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# THE BOOK OF THE ROACH.



THE

## BOOK OF THE ROACH.

BY

*John* GREVILLE FENNELL,  
(OF "THE FIELD.")

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*mc*  
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## P R E F A C E.

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WE were lately accosted by an old friend: "Do you know, Greville F., that many of us have read your articles in the *Field* for years past, until we accept you as one of our authorities upon matters of angling? Now tell us candidly, do you really understand roach-fishing? If you do, why not write a book about it? The salmon, the trout, and the pike have had volumes dedicated to them, and surely a fish, the pursuit of which is a favourite amusement with so many, deserves a special book of its own. Some may object to the roach being raised to this honour; say that it is not a game fish, and therefore unworthy of the notice of anglers. But we must remember that we have anglers of many classes; for, while some affect the higher branches of the art, and can afford the attendant expenses, there are others who—more humble in their notions of enjoyment—do not soar so high, and are well content with less pretentious sport."

The subjoined pages are our substantive reply to the wish so kindly expressed. To decide how much we know about roach-fishing must now be left to our brother anglers, who are the only competent judges; and may they prove merciful.

Upon looking through what had been written upon roach-fishing, we found that there were three courses open

to us. The first, to ignore all but our own personal experience, which would have prevented our giving an exhaustive view of the subject—an object we consider most desirable. Secondly, to appropriate without scruple, and re-write the information handed down to us for the last three hundred years—a system of book-making which unhappily characterizes a great portion of our angling literature. Or, thirdly, to make free use, wherever expedient, of the labours of former authors, giving them full credit for the originality and value of their ideas, and transcribing the extracts as nearly as possible in their own words. We have chosen the first and last of these three lines of procedure, and trust the blending of the two will prove in every respect satisfactory and acceptable to our readers.

GREVILLE FENNELL.

BARNES, SURREY,

11th July, 1870.

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# THE BOOK OF THE ROACH.

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

NO AUTHOR-FISHERMAN has hitherto paid special attention to the roach, although most writers on angling have given him a few pages; joining his name in many cases to some depreciatory epithets, such as foolish or sheepish.

Now we venture to think that those who thus wrote knew really very little about the roach and his habits.

Except the carp, and at times the barbel, we are acquainted with no fish the capture of which requires so much skill and attention, whether it be to baits, seasons methods of fishing, or tackle.

The great scarcity, and consequently increased cost, of trout and other fishing of a superior description, have compelled many who formerly enjoyed these to content themselves with the pursuit of the roach. And good sport, even of this class, becomes every day more difficult to obtain.

If we look for the causes which culminate in this state of things, we shall find:—

I. That the character of rivers has been very much altered of late years by draining. Formerly, after heavy rain, the streams would remain discoloured for days, sometimes weeks, but now the waters become bright in perhaps one-fourth of the time.

II. The damage caused by impurities from chemical works, sewage, and sheep-washing, which even when not

sufficiently intense to destroy life, produces languor and distaste for food.

III. The greatly increased number of anglers of all descriptions, and the consequent miscellaneous assortment of tackle presented to the scrutiny of the fish rendering them shy and timid, and only to be entrapped by the most consummate skill and the finest implements.

Last, but not least, that the value of even the coarsest fish has risen so much that most rivers and streams are now swept night after night by the poacher's net; the constant operation of which has reduced the size of fish taken, particularly roach, to one-fourth of what would be a fair average weight.

The works of the different authors who have mentioned roach-fishing coincide in few particulars; since each writer treats only of the local methods known to himself, and in many instances obtrudes his favourite hobby, to the exclusion of everything else.

Blain, indeed, admits that however well individual fish may be described, with their habits and mode of capture in any special district, yet, altered as these become through external agencies which affect both fish and fishermen, it would be necessary to collect information from very extended sources to obtain any satisfactory practical knowledge of the art. It is thus that Bambridge expends only half a page on the natural history and capture of the roach, devoting a third of another to assure us that the fish are poor and the sport worthless. Salter, on the other hand, presents us with seven pages specially devoted to roach-fishing, and the numerous minor notices and notes scattered throughout his work would probably occupy three or four more. And we believe that even in Salter's day, no London angler, nor many country ones, thought this notice a line too long.

Mr. Daniel likewise favours us with a dozen pages on this fish, and the different methods of taking it, which attention to the subject on the part of authors of such repute is sufficient to show, that although in some localities it may be lightly esteemed, in others it is considered to afford excellent sport.

Our ambition is to go far beyond any previous writer upon the roach, and to give an account of the various methods practised in different localities, and under dif-

ferent circumstances. Roach-fishing, as we have said, cannot be treated as an entirety; being influenced by so many special conditions: water, weather, temperature, and season, and above all food. Many fish, such as perch, jack, chub, &c., appear not to vary much in their habits from time to time, but with roach very trifling alterations in circumstances produce marked differences of behaviour in the fish. When we first knew the Thames the river was kept in condition by freshets for a considerable time after each fall of rain. Now, owing to the improvements in drainage, the benefit derived from a flush of water is often lost in a few hours, so that the really good time for angling is reduced to a small fraction of the number of days or hours we formerly enjoyed. We must not grumble about this state of things, as we could hardly wish them altered, if even we had the power to change them; the benefit to the farmer and the country generally of this improved system of drainage being almost incalculable. The change, however, almost ruins the fisherman's sport.

"Oh! he is only a roach fisher," is often used as a term of depreciation. As if fishing for roach did not require as much skill as any other branch of the art to entitle its disciple to the distinction of an angler? "Roach," says Thomas Boosey in his 'Piscatorial Reminiscences and Gleanings,' "require as much attention in the taking as the large fish; roach-fishing, however, affords such amusement, that many angle for this fish only."

Blain says: "Roach angling offers much interest to the piscatory zealots who are shut out from the higher pursuit of fly-fishing. The roach is an elegant fish when taken, and requires some skill to deceive it, whilst its game qualities are such that it contests the matter with the angler to the last, so as to yield no small triumph when landed." We have seen a roach of even a pound weight, in a strong current in the Thames, raise the blood in the face of an angler of fair fame. They bite freely when in condition; but we consider the principal hold they have, or ought to have, on the angler, is their great plenty, and the numerous methods which may be employed to take them, to which may be added the time of year that sport may be obtained with them, which is when few other fish yield any. From the very bottom of the water, every inch of the way to the surface, they can be fished for in various

manners; and when sunning themselves at the top they will take a fly with the best. "No fish whatever exerts the capabilities of the angler so extensively as the roach; even the grayling (whose versatility in yielding sport is great also) must nevertheless give place to the roach, a precedence which we think will always rank him as a distinguished member in the piscatory list; and this opinion," adds Blain, "from one devotedly fond of fly-fishing, may be considered in favour of his tribe and qualities."

We can fully endorse the opinions of these high authorities, and have no desire to draw invidious comparisons; but having devoted almost the whole leisure of a long life to the capture of the finny tribe—from the lordly salmon to the plebeian "tittlebat"—by fair and sportsmanlike means, and having been as successful as most in each branch of these pursuits, we trust we may, without presumption, claim a right to say that roach fishing is a department of angling which requires as much tact and experience as fishing for jack, trout, or even (and we say so most advisedly) salmon. We do not require to carry our advocacy of roach fishing beyond this. All we claim is that it shall be fairly placed alongside any other branch of our elegant art, and not be sneered at as one that is unworthy attention.

But if we chose to go farther than this, and we believe we could successfully show that in many respects roach fishing presents difficulties to overcome which would exhaust the resources of the habitual trout and salmon angler, we should merely do so to refute a vulgar prejudice, and to convince "the higher order" of anglers that their contempt is not only misplaced but unjust. Comparisons are, however, odious, and therefore let each order of Angling stand upon its respective merits. At present the humble roach fisher looks up with admiration to the salmon slayer, while the latter recounts his fights with monsters in silver armour, weighing their thirty and forty pounds, and "cutting red." Yet if he be told, and truthfully, that under favourable and average circumstances it takes as much skill to kill a barbel of six pounds as it does to land a salmon; as much quickness of eye and readiness of hand to kill two dace out of six that rise at his fly, as it does to take every second trout; and that to take every second trout is equal to performing the same feat with salmon;

the uninitiated will begin to learn that dace-fishing, certainly so far as hooking the fish, is more difficult than salmon fishing. Every ingenuous angler who has passed through the various grades of his pleasurable studies, will tell you this. Of course we only speak of skill, and do not allude to the weight of the respective prizes, their marketable value, nor to the wild and soul-inspiring scenery amidst which the salmonidæ are generally met with. These are æsthetic considerations, having, of course, their response in the heart of every admirer of God's works. We simply allude to the power of capturing the prey of which each individual is in search. We therefore repeat that, to be a good roach angler requires peculiar gifts which entitle the votaries of this pastime to respect; and should any one of the great salmon fishers doubt this assertion, when passing the roach fisher upon Thames, Trent, or Lea, let him request permission to hold the rod for a while, and then compare his take with that of its owner—time for time being occupied. Many a man who has thought the affair most easy while looking on, has been compelled to confess to himself, if not to others, that there was "more in it" than he had suspected.

We were first initiated into the art and mystery of roach fishing at Broxbourne, on the river Lea, amongst some of the best anglers then living. When we mention the names of Messrs. Moule, Baddeley, Sumner, Charles Holloway, Robert Slowman, and H. Wicks, we give an assurance that we angled in the choicest company of roach fishers of that period.

Our late dear friend Edward Jesse, says: "Roach form another distinct class of Thames fishermen, and it is very seldom they try for anything else, or indeed understand any other sort of fishing. So keen, however, are they at this sport, that many pursue it very late in the year; and a retired surgeon named Wood is still talked of at Hampton, as having braved the coldest weather in winter in order to follow his favourite diversion. He would get up before it was light, have his breakfast, and fish till it was dark, at a time when the wet was freezing on his line. He had always, however, a *hot* dinner brought to the boat, which must have kept him from starving in both senses."

And what says Walton?—"And lastly, let me tell you, the roach makes an angler excellent sport; especially the

great roaches about London, where I think there be the best roach anglers."

We have recalled above—although the time to which we allude is now nearly forty years ago—names still familiar to the frequenters of the famous hostelry, the Crown, at Broxbourne, then kept by the brothers Want, and now by Mr. Benningfield. It was from a punt moored off the then well-known Cow-house swim we really took what may be called our first lesson in roach fishing from Mr. Robert Slowman. And it was considered at that period no little honour for any one to be permitted to stand at the elbow of this celebrated bottom fisher. It was then we learned what a thorough muff we were at the sport, and how much we had both to unlearn and to be taught. As we looked at our mentor's float "with all our eyes," we could not at times see the faintest indication of a nibble, and yet to our surprise a slight movement was made by his fore-arm, the short line would become taut, and a fish well under command of the tip of the top joint, would be fighting for its life the next instant, and shortly afterwards be captured in a masterly manner. Our vision, however, soon became accustomed to the peculiar quiet depression of the float, and these signs were looked for more eagerly than the boldest bite, for they portended the largest fish, which almost invariably bite fine in slow moving or dead waters.

Now it is just the recollection of this first practical lesson in roach fishing which, notwithstanding our conceit amongst our schoolfellows, made us feel how little we knew, and determined us to remedy our ignorance, and surmount, if possible, every difficulty that might present itself.

One of our greatest achievements after this was at a pond in Sussex, in which shoals of roach were to be seen, but could scarcely ever be persuaded to take a baited hook. Morning after morning, and evening after evening we tried to lure a few of these fellows, of which there were many weighing full one-and-a-half pounds. So clear was the water, that every movement of these subtle fish could be seen, and we certainly have never since met with roach so apparently careless of every luxury with which we attempted to coax them. As they would take and swallow or eject small portions of the lighter stuff we threw in to bring them around us, we tried less heavy baits, smaller hooks,

and the finest tackle, but all to no purpose. We then bethought us to imitate as nearly as possible the action of these slowly-descending particles, and instead of using a shotted line which sunk rapidly, and consequently unnaturally, and reached the bottom long before the ground bait, we removed all the shots, and placing them in the quill, formed a self-cocking float, and allowed the bait to sink by its own gravity; we at once found we had achieved a success. The effect was immediate and decided. The only difficulty was to strike quickly enough, as in most instances the bait was taken before the line between the hook and the float had become taut, and thus many fish were lost. For the latter reason, this plan would not succeed so well in thick or semi-clouded waters, because the angler would not have the benefit of seeing each fish take the bait, which is of course a great advantage in this exceptional mode of angling. It may be asked, why then use a float at all, if the eye is to be employed in actually watching the fish take the bait? Simply because the bait would not continue to descend steadily and naturally (as if opposed by a mere film of weed only, for which the line may be taken), but would be subject to an occasional stoppage or slight upward tendency from the action of the fisher, which would seem most suspicious to the ever-watchful roach. The intermediate agency of the float provides for this, as it is on the water as soon as the under portion of the line, and affords perfect steadiness during its downward passage. In thus angling, we found that very little ground bait was necessary—a small portion of chewed bread thrown in occasionally being sufficient, taking care to let the hook go down at the same time with the loose food.

Since writing the above, a valued friend and most successful roach fisher knowing we were collecting all we could in reference to the roach, sends me the following:—“I have made some very good bags of roach, more particularly in the summer, by fishing with a self-cocking float, and no shot, or only one on the line. In this way the hook and bait sink very gradually; and if the bait is thrown in at the same time with a little chewed bread, or a few carrion gentles, or minute pieces of worm (being the same as your bait), the lure is most deceptive. A self-cocking float is easily made by removing the plug and



putting sufficient shots in the quill to sink it to the required depth. This method is wonderfully destructive to dace when the house-fly is used." Thus far he confirms our observation.

How often have we caught those fish over again in our dreams, and that pond has mingled with the many, many lovely scenes into which our rod has led us. It is no mean solace to us that our early pursuits should now take precedence of all other impressions of a long life, in that chamber of the brain in which we are told ghosts of the past will stalk for good or ill, when all else of the mortal is in repose.

"Sleeping we imagine what awake we wish;  
Dogs dream of bones, and fishermen of fish."

FAWKES' *Theocritus*, Idyl xxi.

## CHAPTER II.

"Perch, trout, and salmon love clean waters all,  
 Green weedy roots, and stoney gravell small,  
 So doth the bullhead, gudgeon, and the loach,  
 Who most in shallow brooks delight to bee,  
 The ruffe, the dace, the barbelle and the rock,  
 Gravell and sand do love in lesse degree,  
 But to the deep and shade do more approach,  
 And over head some covert love to see,  
 Of spreading poplar, oake, or willow green,  
 Where underneath they lurke for being seen."

*Secrets of Angling, 1652.*

STRUCTURE — DISEASES — VARIETIES — AZURINE OR BLUE ROACH —  
 RUDD — SPAWNING SEASON — SIZE — GROWTH — HABITAT — TAMEABI-  
 LITY — MIGRATIONS — CANNIBALISM OF ROACH.

THE roach is a handsome fish either in or fresh out of the water; it inhabits many of our deep still rivers, affecting, like others of this genus, quiet waters. It is gregarious, keeping in large shoals; has a small head, a leather mouth, which is round and small, with teeth in the throat; large eyes, the circles of which resemble gold, and the iris red, particularly whilst the fish is in perfection, as it may also be known to be by the smoothness of its scales, which, when out of season, feel like the rough side of an oyster-shell. The side line bends much on the middle towards the belly. The length of the head, compared with the whole length of the head, body, and tail, including the rays, is as one to five; the depth of the body at the commencement of the dorsal fin is to the whole length of the body alone, without the head or caudal fin-rays, as two to five; the muzzle rather sharp; the nostrils double, both pierced with a circular depression, but little in advance of the anterior superior edge of the orbit; the diameter of the eye equal to one-fourth of the whole length of the head, and occupies the second-fourth portion; the nape and back rising suddenly; the dorsal line much more

convex than that of the abdomen; scales rather large, and marked with concentric and radiating lines; the number of punctured scales forming the lateral line forty-three; the oblique line from the base of the dorsal fin down to the scale on the lateral line, seven scales; below the lateral line to the origin of the ventral fin, three scales; the first ray of the dorsal fin lies exactly half way between the point of the nose and the end of the fleshy portion of the tail; the first ray shorter than the second, which is the longest in the fin; both rays simple, all the others diminishing in length and branched; the sixth ray as long as the base of the fin; the upper ray of the pectoral fin the longest and simple, all the others branched; the length of the fin equal to the distance from the front of the eye to the free edge of the operculum; the ventral fins rise on a vertical line, directly under the first ray of the dorsal fin; the upper ray the longest and simple, the others branched; the anal fin commences on a line with the ends of the rays of the dorsal fin when folded down, the first ray short, the second ray the longest, both simple, the rest branched; the tail deeply forked, the central rays scarcely half as long as the outer rays.

The fin rays in number are—D 12, P 17, V 9, A 13, C 19.

The colour of the upper part of the head and back dusky green, with blue reflections, becoming lighter on the sides, and passing into silvery white; dorsal and caudal fins pale brown, tinged with red; pectoral fins, orange red; ventral and anal fins, bright red.

The above scientific description of the roach is rendered necessary from the fact, that at certain seasons of the year and during certain periods of growth it is often confounded with other fish of an apparently similar character. We shall studiously avoid as much as possible all learned formulæ, but we fear it may be difficult in the treatment of a subject which we do not think has been hitherto dwelt upon—we mean the *indications* that the mouths of fish afford to the angler—altogether to make ourselves understood without calling in the assistance of terms not common to all. We will, however, endeavour to explain ourselves in as simple language as is possible.

If the angler will carefully examine for himself the mouth of a roach, he will at once perceive that it is very

different in its construction from the appearance it presents to a cursory observation. Let him, for instance, insert the disgorgers or a piece of twig in the mouth, and pressing upwards bring forward the upper lip. He will then see, if he has not noticed it before when removing the hook, that the upper lip is shaped like the hood of a bathing-machine, or an old lady's sun-bonnet; in fact, it possesses the power of elongation and permits of the fish feeding on the ground, thus placing it on a level with the barbel and gudgeon genus. We think that this formation of the mouth affords strong evidence that it is the nature of the roach to feed at various depths. Many have observed their habit in very hot weather of resting in mid water with their vision intently directed downward. But this inclination, we believe, is more induced by an instinct to avoid the painful glare of the sun upon the exposed retina of the eye, than any attempt on the part of the fish to detect the presence or movement of food—the excessive heat at those times inducing, as with all other species of animal nature, almost a distaste for food. Nor have we found that this particular habit has been indulged in by roach where the shade of weeds or overhanging trees is within a reasonable distance, but only in navigable rivers of contracted width—the Lea, for instance—where the sharp plough-like movement of the barges, added to their velocity of transit, cuts down all aquatic cover. One thing is quite certain, that no temptation whatever will induce them to feed at such times.

The teeth of the roach, like those of all the carp family, are placed in the throat. These teeth prepare the food for the stomach by working against a gristly plate in the upper part of the throat, in front of which will be found the soft fleshy mass commonly known as “carp tongue;” the real tongue, however, is placed as usual between the mandibles, and is small and inconspicuous.

There is no reason to doubt that roach, as well as other fish, are liable to diseases arising from poisonous contamination and other causes, but few are ever seen dead in the water, there being too many aquatic scavengers to allow this waste of food. In general the weak fall a prey to the strong before the period of natural decay. Fishes are, moreover, exposed not only to external foes, which it requires all their dexterity to escape, but to the torment

of parasitical marauders in their own person—creatures which make a lodgment in the intestines, beneath the scales, in the mouth and in the gills.

The cause of the black spots observable upon roach at different seasons and in all waters has not as yet been clearly ascertained. We have taken 30lb. of roach from the Loddon in a day, amongst which there has not been a single fish without one or more of these spots, and some have been covered with them, even to the extremity of the caudal and other fins. The Thames roach during some seasons are much covered with these spots, but they do not seem to last for any length of time in that river. We do not find in our reading that these marks or their causes have been noticed by authors, excepting once by Salter, who attributed them to a particular locality in the Lea, and to fish of that locality only. We allude to this fact in our No. 1, "Rail and Rod: Great Eastern Railway," and state from our own knowledge that at Blackpool, in the Rye House Fishery, roach are still taken as described by Salter. We have more than once endeavoured to direct attention to this subject, and to induce that inquiry and investigation which we consider so interesting a fact deserves. Some say, that as regards Blackpool, the peaty nature of its bottom, from which huge black trunks of trees often turn up, may account for these spots, as, although there are other portions of the water of greater depth, the spotted fish are only caught in this hole. From a bag of 20lb. of roach taken at Reading in November, 1867, we took two fish much marked with this strange, and as yet mysterious complaint. As far as we could then hazard a guess it appeared to be chiefly amongst fish found on an artificial bed or in water widened and deepened by the hand of man, rather than by the workings of the natural element. We were in hopes that the searching powers of the microscope would have afforded us some clue to its origin, but it left us where we commenced. There are naturalists who attribute these marks to a particular weed the fish eat. Query, *what* weed? Are the same fish spotted all the year through or only at particular seasons? Do the spots go from one part of the body and appear in others? The Colne fish, which we had imagined from a close examination of some hundreds at different times to be perfectly free from these

spots, appear to have them in the lower part of that river below Maysbury, and some dace that were brought to us from the head of the Linoleum Factory Mill at Staines were literally covered with them. It appears to be a matter of some importance to discover the cause of this disease, which might possibly lead to a remedy, as fish thus marked convey a prejudice in most minds against their use as food.

Roach when in full season are a plucky fish, and with fine tackle afford very exciting sport. A love for roach-fishing has prevailed, or does prevail, in almost every angler; although he may never have had the slightest desire to fish for barbel or bream, roach have during some portion of his life occupied his most ardent thoughts, even if they have not continued prominent objects of his affections. Great skill, as before observed, is necessary in their capture, and although the notion exists amongst many that it is an easy fish to hook if not to land, yet this idea probably arises from a limited experience of some small and confined pond in which food is scarce, and those who entertain it have but to try their skill in a large river to prove how false is the assumption.

Roach spawn upon weeds in shallow water about the middle of May, but in forward summers, or after mild winters, they will cast their spawn in the latter end of April. Their spawning time most certainly varies in different localities; and this variation is not affected by latitude, it would seem, so much as the temperature and chemical properties of the waters and the character of the soil over which such waters pass. It is, therefore, a question whether fenced or closed months can fairly be made universal and serve for all rivers alike. There are no two rivers close to London which will better serve to illustrate the admissibility of this doubt than the Thames and Lea. In the former roach commence spawning in the months of April and May, and therefore very properly the waters are barred to the angler. In the Lea roach are sometimes caught full of roe in the middle of June, and even later, and therefore in the latter river fishing for them is permitted even in some of the best subscription waters throughout the months of March, April, and May. For some weeks after spawning they are very sickly. Their scales are then nearly as rough as

oyster-shells, and they are altogether unfit for food if caught; but at this time roach are not much disposed to take a bait. Immediately after they come off their spawning shallows, which they seldom occupy for more than a week, they move into slightly deeper water and rub against the sandy or gravelly bottom to clean themselves. Towards the end of July they begin to improve in health, and will more freely take a bait; but they will do so much better some weeks later in the season, after leaving the weeds upon which they have fed. These begin to turn sour in September, and rot shortly afterwards, when the fish desert them and take up their abode for the winter in deep water.

Long before this, however, and when on the scours, great quantities can be taken with almost any description of fly, but it is—very properly—not considered sportsmanlike, nor are they worth cooking when caught.

The roach when spawning, like all other fish, are very much exposed to destruction by poaching and other questionable practices. It cannot be too well known that the barbarous mode of “snatching”—(that is, by sinking and rapidly drawing of a number of bare hooks fastened back to back upon a leaded line)—is illegal; as indeed is also the sinking of baskets, &c., at weirs, mill-tails, &c., where the fish congregate in thousands during their attempts to ascend the rivers to get at suitable shallows when the water is more fully charged with oxygen.

Roach, by their formation, appear to be incapable of buffeting strong currents, and therefore are mostly found in streams running not more than two miles an hour, or in eddies, where they can indulge in contention for a short time with the force of the waters, and return to quiet and inactivity.

Roach would appear to be very abundant in the United States, and to differ very slightly, if at all, from those of Great Britain.

“Unimportant and generally despised as these minor fish are in Canada,” says Major W. Ross King, in his ‘Sportsman and Naturalist in Canada,’ “where there are so many far superior ones, some of my old comrades who may read these pages will recall the amusement rather than sport, that they afforded us . . . . How, when our

horses were unsaddled and picketed, and a fire lighted at the water's edge, we commenced to pull out first one kind and then another as fast as the most unreasonable angler could wish; and how, as they were caught they were split open, fried on the wood ashes, and eaten with a relish which their own merits never deserved." The Major is clearly here infected with prejudice, or he never would have committed such a "bull;" where else do we look for merits in fish, if not from the relish they impart in the process of eating?

"The roach is caught in the rivers of Norfolk in company with bream and rudd, but in the spawning season has its peculiarities. The bream always spawn in a 'broad' in preference to a river, if they have choice, and rudd do the same; but roach generally resort to the river for this purpose, or else, as is often the case, select an intermediate situation in the main dyke by which broad and river are united. At that time they crowd together along the rushes which fringe the bank in such dense multitudes that every instant you see small ones raised momentarily half out of the water by the passage of large roach. They appear to lose all fear in the overwhelming instinct which prompts them to propagation, and may be scooped out in numbers with a landing net; if a bow-net be put in, they will crowd in until the centre can contain no more." The Reverend Richard Lubbock further tells us that, "the roach is most abundant in the broads, and in all parts of the Norfolk rivers, growing to a large size, two pounds and upwards."

Upon the question of the size that roach commonly, or occasionally, attain—if we are to believe what we read—although in parts as prolific as ever, they have fallen off amazingly in their individual weight. Pennant speaks of a true roach of five pounds weight. Mr. Jesse says that the largest he has known to be caught in the Thames weighed three pounds. Yet how few of the present day can say they ever saw a roach of even one pound and three-quarters. The Thames roach of my acquaintance very rarely reach beyond one pound and a half in weight, and half-a-pound is nearer the general average; yet "in Dorset and Wilts they have been taken of two pounds and two pounds and a half;" and "in the Trent, it is not unusual to find three or four of one pound and three-quarters to two pounds amongst the takes after a party has done fishing. The



largest being taken in about seven to ten feet of water and when the rivers are coloured; the larger the worm the more likely is the prey to be a heavy fish." The large fish do not like a muddy or slimy bottom, and a roach fisher of any experience will always be enabled to tell their haunts, provided he can see what is below. Should he doubt the character of the bottom, a piece of suet or tallow attached under his plummet, will, after taking soundings, bring up enough of the silt to judge by. Many excellent roach fishers always go thus provided, particularly when visiting new localities. Walton considered a roach of two pounds worthy of particular mention. Sir John Hawkins, in a note to Walton, edition 1808, observes: "I know not what roaches are caught below Bridge, but above, I am sure that they are very large; for on the 15th September, 1754, at Hampton, I caught one that was fourteen inches and an eighth from eye to fork, and in weight wanted but an ounce of two pounds. The Thames, as well above as below London Bridge, was formerly much resorted to by London anglers; and, what is strange to think of, considering the unpleasantness of the station, they were used to fish near the starlings of the bridge. This will account for the many fishing-tackle shops that were formerly in Crooked Lane, which leads to the Bridge." Myriads of fish are now destroyed by the bad water on making this journey.

We were in hopes that when the Serpentine was emptied in the autumn of 1869, some large roach would be found; but Mr. Frank Buckland writes us: "The largest roach we took out with the nets was one pound fifteen ounces, and there were others of one pound six ounces, one pound four ounces, one pound two ounces, and one pound one ounce."

There was a roach taken in Godfrey water, the Colne at Thorney Broad, West Drayton, of two pounds two ounces, and the excitement amongst the London clubs was "prodigious," showing that such a weight was most uncommon. The largest roach in the Piscatorial Society's collection at the Star and Garter, Pall Mall, weighs only one pound thirteen ounces: it was caught by Mr. Sandall, at Maple Durham, in the Thames. Although the Dutch roach are accepted as larger than the British, one of two pounds and a half which came to Billingsgate in March, 1870, was considered sufficiently exceptional to induce a cast to be

made of it, and a model in plaster is in the possession of Mr. Garrard, fishmonger, New Cut, Lambeth. Thomas Best, in his "Concise Treatise of the Art of Angling," says, "the largest roach in this kingdom are taken in the Thames, where many have been caught of two and a half pounds weight."

Where are they now? A roach of three quarters of a pound is a prize. Salter, a great Lea authority, says, "Roach seldom exceed two pounds in weight: indeed, it is very unusual to catch them so large, though I have heard of one being caught in the Grand Junction Canal which weighed one pound and three quarters." In the *Morning Post* of October 22, 1821: "Angling in Hampton Deep.—Upwards of 100 dozen of fine roach were caught in one day; several weighed one pound and a half each! The oldest fisherman does not recollect anything like it before in angling. It was one of the finest day's sport ever known, and the fishermen attending could not take the fish off the hooks quick enough." Robert Blakey says, "roach attain a large size. They are *said* to have been killed in England of the weight of two pounds." Thus the presumption is that even Blakey never saw a roach of the size he mentions.

Mr. W. Wright, in his "Fishing and Fishes," writes: "At Richmond a gentleman with whom I am acquainted caught a roach weighing four pounds, which was preserved and shown to a number of persons." If this had been the case it would have turned up ere this during the earnest and searching inquiry into the subject of weight. Baddeley tells us in his "London Angler," "An old New River angler caught a roach at the Rockbridge weighing two pounds and half an ounce, with a single hair line." Mr. Sumner, who fished for roach during the season every week for years, and travelled miles in every direction to do so, has told us that he "never took a roach over two pounds and a quarter, nor saw one of two pounds and a half."

Wherefore then this great disparity of evidence? It is really enough to shake our faith in books. It will, however, be observed that all the roach mentioned as above three pounds in weight are but hearsay. No one writer who records the fact says so from his own personal knowledge. We know that roach vary much in size in different

localities, and are equally aware that chub, rudd, and bream have often been confounded with the fish in question; but long as we have tried to catch, or get a full unqualified examination of a roach above two pounds and a quarter, we have not as yet succeeded, and would go a long way to do so. We do not, therefore, think there is any authentic evidence of roach much over two pounds, and few reach that weight. In the instance quoted by Mr. Jesse, he says, "the largest roach I can hear of weighed three pounds." But Jesse was acquainted with Yarrell, and Yarrell, quoting from Pennant, mentions one of five pounds, which was evidently too much for Mr. Jesse. For some ten years we offered a sovereign for a roach of two pounds, five and twenty shillings for one of two pounds and a quarter, two sovereigns for one of three pounds, and six sovereigns for one above an ounce more than the latter weight. We got but five communications respecting this premium, four of which were soon disposed of as useless, the fifth, however, was from a nobleman in Nottinghamshire, who kindly wrote to say that his keepers had often told him that, while catching bait for his visitors to fish for pike, they took roach of two and a half and some full three pounds in weight, which being too big for angling were either thrown aside or returned to the river. We immediately wrote to the keepers, who had already received directions to send us the largest examples they could lay their hands on, and to our great delight a hamper reached us a few days afterwards with a note from his lordship expressing the pleasure he had in gratifying our wish. The hamper was opened and the fish sorted. The contents consisted of bream—both carp-bream and the silver kind—chub, roach, and dace. With the hamper there was likewise a note from the head keeper, which stated that he had forwarded carp and roach. Upon weighing the largest roach it did not turn the scale at a pound, and it was clear to us that the bream had been taken for carp, and the chub for roach. And this ignorance of fish amongst keepers—keepers who know everything on land—is very far from rare. All such "small deer" by them are ranked under one general term of "white fish," and consequently as "varmint."

It is incontestable that river roach are superior to those

taken in ponds, in size, pluck, and flavour, as indeed are all other fish. They delight in deep water, and well shaded holes with a sandy bottom. In summer they frequent shallow places, hiding among weeds; but about September the weeds rot, and they retire to the deeps, and then commences the roach fisher's harvest. Some writers assert that the roach continues to feed on the weeds after they have become rotten. This is an error. When the weeds get sour, the roach reject them, and then it is they are compelled to seek other food. The season for roach fishing in the Thames begins about the end of August, and continues much longer than it is pleasant, except to thoroughbred anglers. About September all the oldest observers of their habits agree that the weeds become disagreeable to their palate, and they leave them. This happens sooner or later, as the season is wet or dry.

"The growth of fish," says Simeon, "under certain circumstances, is much promoted by their transfer from one piece of water to another. In a pond, the roach in which were very numerous, and ran generally from about four to six inches in length, a friend and I one morning, just at the close of the hay harvest, throwing a worm fly-fashion, and drawing it in very slowly, caught, to our great surprise, some twenty or thirty, weighing one with another nearly, or quite, a pound each. We were altogether at a loss to understand what could have led to their attaining this unusual size, until we found that about that number, which had been taken out of another pond and afterwards for some time incarcerated in a tank in the stable-yard, had been turned in there. The change from the short commons on which they had been kept in the tank, to the more liberal fare furnished by their new quarters, added to the fact that the pond, from being of comparatively recent construction, afforded an extra supply of food, had doubtless been the simple causes to which this increase in their growth was attributable. It would seem, strange to say, that we that day caught every one of the large roach which the pond contained. At least, I believe that never since—and that must be now some twelve or fifteen years ago—has a single one approaching their size been taken out of it."

Yarrell tells us that "the roach is said to be abundant in almost all the rivers throughout the continent of

Europe, and in this country appears to be a very common fish, inhabiting most of our rivers, but preferring those that are slow in their course, frequenting the deepest parts by day, and by night feeding on the shallows. A specimen sent to me from Scotland by Sir William Jardine, Bart., was rather shorter and deeper than the roach of the south."

Their best haunts are in deep, quiet running waters, and holes where the shadow of the trees and banks secures them from the annoyance caused by passing objects. We have for the most part found that they delight in a bottom of sand and gravel, but some of those we have caught have been more or less solitary in their habits, and were found where a description of slimy marl existed. They come from their holes into shallow water in the summer, and feed a good deal upon the animalculæ met with amongst the weed which hangs upon old woodwork, and if the water be thick, a good deal amongst the weeds. At this time it is almost useless to angle for any that exceed a few ounces in weight, but we have been led to believe that if the habits of the roach were more carefully observed and their stomachs and food scrupulously examined, sufficient information might be gleaned of their favourite food at certain periods, to permit of a paste being mixed compounded partly of small insects and weed, that should tempt them to the hook with the same avidity they exhibit during the autumn and winter. We are the more induced to this conclusion from the fact that roach, if watched from places where in turn they cannot see their inspector, appear to be almost always on the feed.

There cannot exist a doubt that all fish feed upon the spawn of their fellows, and, from its size and colour, are especially fond of salmon roe; the use of which for bait is now rendered illegal, although curiously enough not a word is said about the roe of trout. It appears to be relished by every species. An author whose name has escaped us alludes to the habit of roach feeding when in ponds upon the spawn of the carp. He says that at one time by constantly feeding the roach in a small lake he brought them to such a degree of tameness that they would take bread out of his fingers and play round and round through them in scores. Generally they collected in numbers waiting to be fed at their accustomed break-

fast time, but he noticed that while the carp were engaged in spawning only two or three made their appearance, and even they would scarcely look at the bread which he offered them, being doubtless gorged with carp spawn. Indeed, he had frequently detected them at intervals dashing about, close in the wake of carp which were engaged in spawning. But he thinks that if roach do thus make free with the spawn of the carp, yet he suspects they are useful to the parent fish in relieving them from water lice, with which they are occasionally much infested. This suspicion he grounds on the fact, that having seen carp on the surface, with roach swarming closely round them, and succeeded on several occasions by foul hooking or otherwise, in taking them from the midst of such company, he invariably found them to be suffering from these parasites. When in this state they rapidly lose condition, and sometimes become so weak that they will suffer themselves to be taken out of the water with the hand. Some confirmatory facts regarding the fondness of roach for these lice will be met with under the head of Baits.

It has been thought by some authors that the migration of roach; that is, their ascent of rivers to gain a suitable spot for spawning; which they do at that time by fighting their way up the strongest rapids with persistent energy; takes place from the sea, but this opinion seems to be erroneous, as all experiments have tended to prove that they will not live in salt water. Yarrell very properly observes, "but the roach in this instance come from the direction only in which the sea lies,—not, I apprehend, from the sea itself." And Mr. Donovan, to show that they cannot live in salt water, quotes the following fact, which came under his own observation. In a small river that runs into a large piece of water of nearly two miles in extent, close to the sea, on the south coast of Devon, there is no outlet save by means of percolation through the shingle that forms the barrier between it and the sea. In this situation roach thrive and multiply beyond all belief. About eight or nine years ago the sea broke its boundaries, and flowed copiously into the lake at every tide for a considerable time, by which the fish of every species were destroyed.

We can fully confirm the above; a very high tide from the sea having entered the confluence of the Stour and

Avon while we were staying at Christchurch some twenty years ago, it turned up and killed fish of all descriptions.

The Rev. David Ure, in a statistical account describing the roach in the parish of Killearn, Scotland, says, "vast shoals come up from Loch Lomond, and by nets are caught by thousands; their emigration from the loch, however, is only for the space of three or four days about the end of May."

The representation of the fish at the bottom of the title-page of the third volume of Pennant's "British Zoology," is that of a rudd or red-eye, and not that of a roach, as stated; which the position of the dorsal fin and comparison with the figure of the rudd at plate 83, page 479, will sufficiently testify.

An acquaintance told me that some time since, on taking up some trimmers baited with roach in the lake in Southill Park, he found on one of the lines a roach of about two pounds weight, which he secured. It was not hooked, but had the bait in its mouth, the *head* only appearing. Upon another occasion he was fishing in the same water for perch at the same spot, as near as he could recollect, and caught a roach of similar weight on a paternoster baited with a small roach. On inquiring of the keepers in both instances, they had never known roach taken in the same way. The two facts, therefore, surprised the angler, and he applied to the *Field* for information. To which the editor of that paper added: "The above fact is curious. We have known roach to take a spinning bait. We once likewise, when spinning with one of the Kemps at Teddington weir for trout, had several runs for small fish, which we thought to be chub, and after some four or five misses, we hooked fairly in the mouth a roach of about one pound."—*Field*, January 16, 1864.

According to the report of Samuel Clark, Esq., to the Royal Society, a roach gave 81,586 eggs, weighing 361 grains.

**The Azurine or Blue Roach.**—This is a scarce species which has been comparatively recently added to our British catalogue. It is, however, an inhabitant of some of the Swiss lakes. The examples alluded to in Mr. Yarrell's work were sent to that author by the late Lord Derby from Knowsley, and even there the localities from which they are attainable are limited. It is stated to be hardy,

tenacious of life, and spawns like other roach in May. The flesh is said to be firm, of good flavour, and to resemble that of the perch. The food and baits used for its capture are those taken by the carp; and the largest specimen known was not supposed to exceed one pound in weight. We were told that the azurine was to be found in a pond on the Dartford Marshes, but all our efforts to obtain one from that locality have been fruitless.

The azurine has the upper part of the head, back, and sides of slate blue, passing into silvery white beneath, and both shining with metallic lustre; the irides white tinged with pale straw colour: all the fins white. The depth of the fish is to the length as two to seven, and it is therefore in shape something similar to a rudd, but is at once distinguished from that species by the slate blue colour of the back, the silvery whiteness of the abdomen, and also by its white fins, which in the rudd are of a fine vermilion.

**The Rudd or Red-eye** (*Cyprenus Erythrophthalmus*).—This work would be incomplete without some mention of the rudd, of which Walton says: "There is a kind of bastard small roach, that breeds in ponds, with very forked tail, and of very small size; which some say is bred of the bream and right roach; they differ from the true roach as much as a herring from a pilchard. And this bastard breed of roach is now scattered in many rivers, but I think not in the Thames."

Yarrell upon this says that "It is probable that the fishes here alluded to were the true rudd."

We have occasionally taken rudd in the Thames, the Lea, and Dagenham Breach, and there are many ponds and rivers within thirty miles of London in which they are to be met with in abundance, more particularly in the Loddon above Twyford, and the ponds in Wanstead Park. The rudd is likewise found in Oxfordshire and Warwickshire, and in the Cam and Lode in Cambridgeshire. But perhaps it is most prolific in the broads of Norfolk, where it is known as the Rond, a name that occurs in Willughby. It is likewise met with in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, in Lough Neagh in Ireland, where it is called a roach, and it is said to occur in Scotland. In France it is called the roach-carp.

Its name is a corruption of ruddy, derived from the prevailing golden coppery tint which ornaments the whole



surface. The term red-eye refers to the colour of the irides. The rudd, in addition to its vivid colours, is also tenacious of life, and is on that account preferred by trollers as a bait for pike. It requires, however, very tender handling, as the scales come off at almost the slightest contact. It breeds freely without any care being bestowed upon it, and it is therefore useful as food for large perch, trout, and pike. It is said to be a much better fish to eat than the roach. "I have seen marshmen," says Dr. Lubbock, "select rudd for their own cookery, whilst they carried bream and roach home only for the dog or the pig—for be it known that a Norfolk water-dog and a marsh pig are both piscivorous animals."

The food of the rudd consists of worms, molluscos animals, and insects, with some vegetable matter; it spawns in April or early in May, on or about aquatic plants, and the scales at this period are rough to the hand, like those of the roach.

The irides are orange red; the cheeks and gill covers golden yellow; upper part of the back brown, tinged with green and blue; the sides more pale; the belly light golden yellow; the whole surface of the body tinged with a brilliant golden hue, varying when viewed in different positions in reference to the light, which it is difficult to name correctly; the fins more or less bright red, "particularly," says Yarrell, "in those specimens I have seen from the Thames, Cambridgeshire, and Lough Neagh." Dorsal and caudal fin not so bright in colour as the fins of the under surface, but more inclining to reddish brown.

The rudd is very plentiful in the broads, where it is very lively and active, rises freely at flies, and is fond of sporting on the surface. Mr. Daniel makes mention of a rudd accidentally taken with a minnow at Kimpton-Hoo, near Welwyn, Herts. Their most natural habitat is in still waters.

## CHAPTER III.

## REQUISITE TACKLE.

ROD—WINCH—LINE—SHOOTING—FLOATS—HOOKS—DISGORGER—  
LOSS OF FISH THROUGH BAD HOOKS—GUT *versus* HAIR.

**The Rod.**—The roach, or light bottom rod for roach, dace, gudgeon, smelt, and other light and fine fishing, varies in its length according to the accessibility of the place fished, ranging from nine to seventeen feet, while many professional roach fishers often use one of eighteen to nineteen feet. Baddeley, indeed, says that "In some of the best swims in the Lea, a rod twenty or twenty-four feet long is requisite, made of the lightest materials, so that it is straight and strikes true." It can be neither too light nor too elastic, and it is therefore often made of bamboo.

As there are several distinct schools of roach-fishers, and as these agree in few particulars, we will briefly state the principal points of difference in the rods used. The Lea school generally prefer rods from fifteen to twenty feet long, made of a white sort of bamboo cane, reported to be found in perfection in South Carolina. These rods taper very evenly from tip to butt when they are of large size. There is little spring in them, except in a few feet at the top, and they are used sometimes with running lines, but generally without.

The Nottingham rod is from ten to twelve feet in length, and generally made in four pieces, the two lower of choice tough white deal, the two upper of lancewood. It is light and springy, has small upright steel rings, and carries a wooden reel with very light silk running line.

The rod generally used for Thames punt fishing is about nine or ten feet long, made of hickory or bamboo, but we prefer a light Nottingham rod for the purpose.

That for Thames bank fishing may be from eleven to

fourteen feet long, and of the same materials as the punt rod.

We rarely see on the Thames any very long rods, except now and then in the hands of a solitary disciple of the Lea school.

A running line is almost invariably used in Thames fishing.

The rods used for pond fishing are generally similar to those used on the Lea; a running line is often necessary, particularly when there are large carp or bream in the pond.

**Winch or Reel.**—A very great advance has been made in modern times on the old-fashioned brass winch. In some cases the form is improved and rendered more elegant and convenient, in others an entirely new material (ebonite) is employed, doing away with much of the weight. The most startling innovation of all is the cheap wooden Nottingham reel, which, in the hands of those understanding its peculiarities, becomes a useful and powerful assistant, but from its easy running causes great discomfiture to a neophyte.

We are afraid to attempt to describe the proper manner of using them, they must be seen in the hands of a master to be appreciated.

Whatever reel is used it should be of ample size, let out or take in line easily and quickly, and be without checks or stops of any description.

“In most kinds of float-fishing it is not customary to use a winch or reel; but the facility with which, by that means, you may either lengthen or shorten your line, and the propriety of having no more above your float than you absolutely need, should recommend the practice; independently of the occasion you will have for line, if you hook a heavier fish than you had reason to expect. Large barbel are often hooked in roach fishing, and without a running line you must content yourself (as many do) with the satisfaction of telling that ‘you have been broken by a good fish.’ In every kind of fishing, the *finer* your tackle, the more sport you are likely to have, and the finer you fish the more need you have of a reel.”—*Howitt*.

**Lines.**—We must confess to a strong predilection for hair, and always use it ourselves when roach fishing. For moderate waters the hook length of about a foot should be

of fine round even hair of a sorrel or cinnamon colour, the next length of the best and strongest hair to be obtained, of the same colour, and the upper part of two hairs twisted together; this should be weighted as described under Floats and Shots, and is better looped together than tied.

To make a loop, first wet the hair, then tie a common knot within a quarter of an inch of the end; after tapering it lay the end back, and whip it down to the other part of the line with fine silk and shoemakers' wax, whipping over the knot to prevent the short end slipping out. The shot are generally placed near the lower end of the single hair length, and to prevent cutting or chafing the hair, the end is turned back and whipped over for one or two inches, instead of half an inch, which is usually ample; the shot are thus pinched on to a part where the hair is double, and protected by silk whipping. Should more than three or four shot be necessary, the remainder ought to be placed on the next length above in the same manner.

Our heavy lines for deep, quick running water are fitted thus: first a hook length of hair, with one small shot on six inches from the hook; next a short length of strong double hair looped at each end, on which slide two or three small perforated pellets, then one length of the best and strongest hair to be procured, then another short length of double hair with the remainder of the lead pellets necessary, and above all about three feet of twisted human hair. This is laid up in three strands, each containing from six to nine hairs; the lengths are either looped together, as before described, or fastened in the manner gut lines are generally made, the ends being whipped down neatly. To this the running line is fixed, the latter being generally made of fine silk either twisted or platted. The Nottingham make is unsurpassed, those specially manufactured for roach and dace fishing are very fine, and only weigh from one-eighth to one-sixth of an ounce avoirdupois per hundred yards.

Although, as we have said, we give the preference to hair, yet there are many occasions when gut will kill equally well. If the water be at all discoloured there is very little difference in their killing properties; and wherever large carp, bream, or barbel abound, and take the bait in the same swims as the roach, it would be folly to use single hair.

In these cases the gut ought to be fine and stained; many like it of a pale green, or sometimes an inky colour, but we, for our own use, dye it of a dark brown. The same precaution should be taken we have before recommended, of doubling and whipping over the gut wherever the shot are to be nipped on.

We always fish with a running line, but some are so accustomed to a tight line that they cannot fish in comfort with a reel, in consequence of the slackening of the line. This inconvenience may be avoided by tying a small piece of brass wire, or wood, by two half hitches at the proper distance above the float, and then drawing the running line tight; the stop will rest against the wire loop at the top of the rod, and all the advantages of a tight line will be obtained without losing the convenience of the reel.

"Your line should always be single hair, of sorrel or white colour (we prefer the former), and should be very fine at the bottom, especially the piece on which the hook is tied, which should be also perfectly straight, round, and transparent, so that the water shall not bead on it, for if it do the fish will not touch it. The top piece, on which is your float, should be the coarsest and strongest, so that if you break you may not lose your float, and also to give your line a proper throw and play in the water. Upon the top of your line should be looped about eight inches of double thread, with which to loop it to your rod. By adopting this plan you will be able to throw your line out and to strike your fish much better than you would if your hair were looped to your rod. Let the shots on your line be small and close together, about eighteen inches from the hook, with only one about six inches from the hook, which will make it hang in proper trim. Gut is now made expressly for roach fishing as fine and round as hair, but we still give the preference to hair, notwithstanding you might use such gut for very heavy roach."—*Rev. James Martin.*

Roach may be taken in some waters with larger hooks and stronger tackle than that which we have described; but they who fish finest will succeed best, besides the pleasure the angler feels while killing a fish with the elasticity of a hair-line and light pliant rod. Those who object to single hair lines, because they will occasionally break, and cause trouble and delay while at their sport,

must use the finest gut they can procure, which is certainly less liable to break.

Some anglers make their roach lines half single hair, and half two hairs twisted, or as much single hair from the hook as will nearly reach to the float, because in case the line breaks, the single hair will go first; and in that case having the float on the twisted part you save it. "This way," says Salter, "of fitting up hair lines is superior to any other in my opinion." There are other anglers who have gut lines with single hair bottoms, but we totally object to this arrangement, as the want of elasticity in the one has a tendency to bring about disruption in the other. All hair, or all gut.

**Shooting Floats.**—These are so closely connected that we will consider them together, and advance step by step from the lightest to the heaviest.

Blakey recommends a float made of a small piece of the stem of a goose quill, fastened to the line by one ring of quill, and allowed to lie on the water. This may be used with success where the water is shallow and there is little or no stream; the bait being a natural fly of some description. It is generally employed without any lead, but sometimes one small shot is fixed about a foot above the hook. This kind of fishing has proved very successful in the moats which surround the fortified towns in France, and the still, weedy waters of the Pas-de-Calais. A very small phial cork, with the line running through it, is used by some in exactly the same manner with great success.

The next sort is a small porcupine quill with half an inch cut off the top, or half a larger porcupine quill with the broad part upwards, or a small swan quill. Either of these is fit for still water from three to six feet deep; one small shot should be put on about a foot from the hook, and the remainder a foot to eighteen inches higher up.

For deeper still water, or gentle running water of moderate depth, a large porcupine quill or large swan quill shot as last described, will be found to answer well. Many prefer the patent taper quill floats for these purposes, but although we have often used them, we much prefer a float of rather larger section where it emerges from the water. We have tried many experiments with porcupine quill floats, using alternately the broad and narrow ends upwards, but although we were prejudiced in favour

of the fine tip, experience demonstrated that the stout one was far better suited to render visible the very slight depression caused by the bite of a heavy fish, which in still water sometimes does not exceed the sixteenth of an inch.

This statement at first sight appears paradoxical, but we think it will bear examination. First let us ask what is a roach bite? The most probable answer would be, "why, of course, when the fish takes hold of the bait." But this is not what the fish does, but what he does not do. We have passed many many hours watching the habits of different fish, sometimes sheltered behind a tree, sometimes from a bridge, or hanging over the end of a punt with our face nearly touching the water, and sometimes in the quiet of our study by means of a large aquarium; and this is what we have learnt. Minnows, dace, perch, trout, gudgeon, and some others snap at a bait, and really seize hold of it, depressing the float more or less according to their size; but the roach generally takes it in a very different manner. He swims up near the object, opens his mouth and draws in a current of water, together with the substance he is experimenting on. Should it please Mr. Roach it is immediately swallowed, and the water ejected through the gills; but the moment he finds a line attached, or should the flavour not suit his fastidious palate, it is instantly blown out with great force, along with the mouthful of water he has just taken in.

The larger the fish as a rule the more fastidious they are, and the more cautiously they take the bait into their mouths.

It will be seen by this that roach seldom pull at the line as many other fish do, but deflect it slightly, which sometimes causes a trifling retardation of the float, but more generally a slight depression.

Every float requires an amount of surplus buoyancy proportionate to its size, varying from one small shot in still waters, to two or three large ones in deep heavy waters. Without this, that is, supposing it were shotted to the greatest nicety, the most trifling ripple or breeze, or the weight of the wetted line above, would send it under, and render all the indications worthless, as many will remember when they have had a shot too much on the line.

We have taken a favourite Thames float, made of a

large porcupine quill with about an inch cut off the thick end, and the middle covered with a thin layer of cork. This was loaded until about a sixth of an inch was out of water, but when the pointed end was placed upwards it was nearly one inch out of water.

In the former case it was very sensitive, showing an extremely small depression, in the latter the actual depression being nearly the same was imperceptible, and the wind and current caused oscillations far greater than any produced by a bite.

The float just mentioned, carrying from a quarter of an ounce to three-eighths of an ounce of lead, is used for the heaviest and deepest waters frequented by the roach fisher. We generally place one shot about six inches from the hook, about nine inches higher two or three small lead pellets of the shape of grains of oats, and about three feet above these as many larger pellets of the same shape as are necessary to complete the loading. These pellets are cast with perforations, and we prefer them to the large number of shot necessary when heavy floats are used. No more than one shot should ever be placed on the hook length, as the latter so often requires renewal.

The system of shotting in use on the Trent is somewhat different; large shot, generally BB, are used, the first about a foot or eighteen inches from the hook, the next six inches above the first, the next four inches, and the next three. If more are required they are placed about two inches apart, but the floats used are generally made of swan quills, and do not require much lead.

We will only allude to one more plan in common use on the Thames; and this only to caution our readers to avoid it. A long string of shot of different sizes, badly cut, and irregular, like a string of leaden beads, commencing about nine inches above the hook, extending in length from three inches to a foot, and forming a contrivance admirably adapted to startle so wary a fish as the roach.

The best plan of cutting shot is to use a block of hard wood, with two or three small cavities in which the shot will lie without rolling; the knife should be sharp for about two-thirds of the length, but the part nearest the handle should be ground to a thick rounded edge, the shot should be first cut about half way through with the



sharp part of the knife, using a light hammer to give the necessary blow, the thick part of the knife should then be placed in the cut, and another slight blow struck; this makes a sort of groove at the bottom of the cut, and prevents the shot when pinched together from crushing the hair or gut. A very little grease of any sort may be used to prevent the shot adhering to the knife.

The method of attaching floats to lines varies somewhat. When light floats are used on hair or gut lines they are generally fastened by small quill caps at each end, these caps are whipped round with waxed silk, and should have the inner edges filed smooth.

For heavy floats, which are usually placed on the silk running line, nothing answers better than two small loops of brass wire, one near each end of the float, through which the silk line passes. To prevent the float from slipping it is only necessary to make one or two half hitches sailor fashion on either end.

Our article on floats would not be complete without a notice of the travelling float; this is fitted with the two loops last described, and is extremely useful when the depth of water exceeds the length of the rod. A small piece of indiarubber thread is tied into the line at the proper depth by means of two half hitches, this will easily pass through the rings on the rod, and yet rest on the small brass loop fixed to the float, so that there is no hindrance to the latter working properly at any required depth, and yet it never interferes with the killing of a heavy fish. Sometimes a second piece of indiarubber is tied into the line underneath the float to prevent its falling unnecessarily low. There is a great advantage when striking with a float fitted in this manner at the end of a long swim, as the line slips through the loops without dragging the float along, consequently the blow is sharper and quicker.

**Floats.**—"The best floats for Lea roach fishing are those made from swan's quills, which are now manufactured in great perfection. The size of your float should vary according to the depth of the water in which you are fishing. If the water be ten or twelve feet deep you will require a float that takes a good number of shots, or your bait will be too long in sinking to the bottom. And, besides this, the longer your line is, the more shots are necessary to

keep it in proper trim. And the water being deep, the large float will not be objectionable at the top. But never use a large float and a great number of shots in four or five feet of water, for if you do you will be sure to take few roach: I have seen scores of instances of it. I always use a float as small as I conveniently can, and I invariably find it answers best; this must be quite evident at a glance, because the effects on the water are less. Let your float be so shotted that when in the water only about a quarter of an inch is seen, for if there be much out of the water you will not be able to see the bite so well. I always use a float that is rather thick at the top, and have my cap to fit about three-eighths of an inch from the tip, so that when it is in the water the cap just catches the water; I always bind a little wax silk on my cap also, to make it thick, which causes it to rest on the water more steadily. By adopting these methods you will be able to see the finest possible bite, which is very important in roach fishing."—*Rev. J. Martin.*

**Shotting.**—We have already described the plan we recommend for loading lines, but consider the following worthy of attention. If the shot are placed at a great distance from the hook, the length of slack causes the indications of a bite to be very faint, and sometimes quite invisible to the sharpest eyes; if, on the contrary, the shot are placed too near the hook, they are very apt to scare so wary a fish as an old roach. And a further loss occurs, for if once the lord of the shoal takes the bait and rejects it, few if any of the other fish will accept it. Not so if the small fish do the same, it appears to make no difference to their elder brethren. We have watched with our head over a punt for hours the habits of roach, and we can safely answer for this fact, let the largest roach take and blow back the pellet of paste and no other will touch it. But yet more, after the largest roach has thus pronounced upon the deception, or its unpalatable nature, he generally swims off and is followed by the whole shoal.

**Putting Split Shots on to Lines.**—Even at a time when our teeth were as perfect and even as the best artificial set by Truman or Lukyn, we have had an insuperable objection to close split shot on our line with our teeth, or see it done by others. The very association of cold

lead, however infinitesimal in quantity, with so sensitive an agent as the tooth, has something repulsive and "teeth-edging" in the notion. But there is no occasion for this, a pair of plyers, always handy for numberless purposes, is the very best appliance for this purpose, since by their aid the shot can be put on more evenly (a circumstance of some consideration), and much more rapidly than with the mouth.

**Hooks.**—These important items of the fisherman's outfit have hardly had sufficient attention bestowed upon the principle of their construction. Many good hooks have been made and sold, but their success has been owing in a great degree to chance, and a sort of rule of thumb obtained by practice. It is a very difficult thing for any one not a fisherman to copy a hook, ever if he has a good pattern, as two samples may appear perfectly identical to an uneducated eye, and yet possess very different properties. How often has the roach fisher missed fish after fish, and yet could detect nothing amiss with the hook on the closest examination; on changing it for another of the same parcel the vexatious losses have ceased as if by magic. A great difference of opinion exists as to the proper length of shank of a roach hook, some advocate short, others long shanks. Each has its merit, but whichever is employed, the shape of the bend, and especially the direction of the point, ought to be adjusted with reference to the length of the shank. One of the most clever fishermen who ever spun a bait for trout in the Thames, the late Mr. Cox, of Bermondsey, had a theory on the subject which works well when reduced to practice. It was that an angle formed by two lines, one a prolongation of the direction of the point, the other drawn from the point to the top of the shank, ought not to exceed  $22\frac{1}{2}$  degrees, or the fourth of a right angle. Some hooks with long shanks are made with a more acute angle than this, but a vast number, particularly those with short shanks, have such a wide angle that they will not pull in when pressed against the finger. A good test of a small hook is to see if, when properly whipped, it will pull into a piece of soft leather; if it will not do this it is worthless. As a rule the point ought to turn in in inverse proportion to the length of the shank. This is the reason that hooks with a piece broken off the shank rarely answer, as the hook

that will pull in well with a long shank is usually worthless when the angle of pull is altered. Now as to the best sort of hooks to use for the different styles of fishing: for gentles the hook should be about No. 12 or 13, moderately short in the shank, but not extremely so, and made with fine wire; when using this size only one gentle should be used, hooked as slightly as possible through the blunt end: if two or three gentles be used a larger hook, say 9 or 10, is necessary. For boiled wheat or malt a No. 11 or 12 short shank, for paste Nos. 9, 10 or 11, still with short shank, and for worm, Nos. 4, 5 or 8, 9, with long shank, the size depending on the use of lob-worm or red-worm. The points of all hooks ought to be kept extremely sharp, particularly when there is any chance of a barbel, as it is a great trial to fine single hair to strike a hook below the barb in the thick leathery mouth of that fish. A small fine flat watchmaker's file should be kept in the angler's book to renovate hooks when necessary; the points should be filed square, and not rounded, as the edges when left sharp cut in like a glover's needle into leather.

"You must never use the common Kirby hooks for roach fishing, for be sure you will not catch many with them; they are too thick and clumsy, and have too much show about them. The hook must be made expressly for roach, of very fine wire, as it lays hold more quickly and surely, and if tied on neatly is scarcely seen. Be sure they are not too long in the shank, for if they are it is a great objection; yet they must not be too short, for in that case they will not hold the fish after you have hooked it. Never use too large a size, particularly if the water be fine, for we have found they always take the small one more freely. No. 11 is, in our opinion, the best, unless they happen to be very strong on the feed, or it is almost dark. If you just prick your fish and lose it, you may be sure that your hook is blunt, in which case you should have a small piece of black stone always with you, and with it the point of your hook should be sharpened, or a fresh one put on. Sometimes you will find that your hook gets turned on the hair and hangs very improperly, the hair being on the outside of the shank, or on the side of it instead of being inside. When it is, always put on a fresh one, or you will lose above half the fish you hook, for a hook hanging thus will not hold the fish securely."—*Rev. J. Martin.*

**Hook without Barb.**—"I have known many anglers who fished for roach with hooks from which the barb has been removed."—*H. Crystall*.

**Disgorgers.**—One of these useful articles should be always attached to an angler's button by means of a piece of string or small thong of leather, about a foot long.

The best pattern we have seen can be readily made by any one who has seen a specimen. It is so fashioned that the end forms a close spiral, and encircles the line before entering the mouth of the roach, and travels down the line with certainty and ease, performing its duty as it were instinctively, and not requiring a second person to hold the fish.

The affair is simple and cheap, and may be constructed by any one out of a piece of wire of moderate thickness.

**Loss of Fish.**—It often happens that the angler will miss many fish, one after the other, and lose not only bites but fish, after playing them and making certain that they are sure to be the next instant in the hand or landing net. We can recal cases in which this has occurred for half an hour together, and in which, after the closest examination, we could not find anything the matter with the hook. Yet the best proof that there did exist some unperceived radical deficiency, has been shown by changing the hook, when the vexatious cause of annoyance has been at once removed. We have often wondered what could be at fault, and although we have carefully preserved the hook for the closest inspection under a magnifying glass, we could not detect any really sufficient evidence of faultiness to justify its being cast aside. Under these circumstances we have again tried the same hooks, and found them answer tolerably well. The only way we can account for these "on and off" results, is by supposing them not to arise from any inherent defect in the hook itself, but from the set or inclination of the line below the last or bottom shot, presenting the bait in such a way to the fish as only to allow of the hook being taken partly into the mouth or in such a manner that the point of the hook would not pull in. "This losing fish, one after another," says Mr. Wicks, "generally arises from the circumstance of the hair or gut when whipped to the hook not being straight, and this has prevented the proper strike when the roach bite is discovered. This will frequently be observed with hair hooks." In this we entirely agree, and it is one of the few objec-

tions against hair; the fact being that, in contradistinction to gut which becomes limp and pliable by absorption, hair with a tendency to any particular inclination, will defy all the powers of Satan, as we are told by the Spanish poets, to take the curl out of it.

**Hair *versus* Gut.**—A friend, upon the results of whose long experience I can rely, thus writes upon gut and hair: "I can fully corroborate the experience of those who find hair far superior to gut for fine fishing, and I never use anything else for bottom fishing, except among heavy barbel. I have frequently, on the Thames, killed two, three, and four for one, when fishing alongside a friend who used the finest gut. The strength of hair is far greater than is generally supposed: one of moderate quality will lift a pound weight, and it may be obtained occasionally capable of lifting two pounds. Now, few roach rods will take a strain of more than half a pound without injury, therefore the only risk is in striking, which throws a far greater stress on the line than killing a heavy fish. Striking with a long rod in still water, with the top over the float, is a very different matter from striking in a heavy stream with from six to ten feet of water (take Twickenham deep for example) where a long line is indispensable, and the strikes must be quick and sharp. In fishing such places I use a light rod of my own make, Nottingham fashion, about ten feet long, made of deal and lancewood, a quick reel, very fine silk line weighing one-eighth of an ounce to the hundred yards; at the bottom of this I have about one yard of twisted human hair, then a yard of single horse-hair, and the hook length of finer hair. The hair is always looped together, additional strength being thus obtained at its weakest part. Before whipping the loop a knot should be tied near the end, the whipping being carried past it: this is necessary with hair, to prevent it slipping, but not with gut. The silk used should be slightly waxed, and the whipping varnished. Copal varnish is too long drying. I generally use dammar dissolved in benzole; this unites with the wax, and dries very quickly. An excellent varnish may be made with dammar, benzole, shoemaker's wax, and a few drops of any fat oil; this dries quickly, and may be used on unwaxed whipping. Shellac in spirit or naphtha, though excellent for rods, floats, &c., should never be used on waxed silk, as

it will not combine with the wax. I believe the inferiority of gut in clear water to arise from its much greater refractive power, as may be readily seen by putting some gut and hair together in a tumbler of water. I always dye the former with nitrate of silver and gallic acid, and find the fish are not nearly so shy of it. Some of the best hair for twisting formerly came from Buenos Ayres and other South American ports.

"I was first led to notice the great advantage of hair by seeing a man use thick black hair on the River Trent at a time when the water was as clear as crystal. He told me he had used it for many years, that he preferred it for its great strength, and because it was not noticed by the fish in the water so much as white hair. I have often tried it with success, but prefer hair of a natural shade of cinnamon, sorrel, or chestnut; hair of the latter colour being finer and rounder. I have tried some of these with a dead weight of 2lbs., but it is quite unnecessary that hair for general fishing should lift above a fourth of this weight.

"First-rate hair is scarce and costly; by first-rate hair I do not mean coarse hair of great strength, but that which is fine, round, smooth, and elastic."—*M. M.*

**Gut versus Hair.**—Salter says: "In respect to the advantage arising from angling with lines made of single horse-hair, and hooks tied to the same, over those which are made of fine gut, some difference of opinion exists among anglers. The advocates for gut say, when it is equally fine, and of the colour of horse-hair, it is not likely to alarm fish any more than horse-hair, and being much stronger, it certainly deserves the preference. This seems plausible, but I know, from practice, that fish may be taken when angling with a single hair line—especially roach—that will not touch the bait when offered with a gut line, though the line shall be as fine and of the same colour, &c., as the hair line. To ascertain the fact I have several times taken off my hair line when roach have been well on the feed, and put on one of gut. I could then hardly take a fish. Again, I have changed for the hair line, and again had excellent sport. Such has invariably been the case with me and many experienced anglers of my acquaintance, therefore I should certainly recommend single hair to those who fish for roach, &c., and assert,

without fear of contradiction, they will kill nearly two to one to others who angle with gut, however fine. The only reason I can assign for this difference is, that gut swells and ever retains a shining, glossy appearance in the water, and also small beads or bladders of water hang around the gut, which increases its bulk while in the water, and probably creates alarm among fish."

Baddeley says (1834): "An old New River angler caught a roach at the Rock Bridge, New River, weighing two pounds and half an ounce with a single hair." He does not recognise the preference generally given to single hair. "I must differ from them in this respect, as I cannot possibly be brought to believe that fish can distinguish between fine gut and single hair. It is true I am almost alone in my opinion, as the objections to gut are numerous, some asserting that gut beads in the water, that the stiffness will always be an impediment, however fine stained or pliant; it is contended that the pliancy of single hair greatly increases the success. In my opinion single hair has no advantage over fine gut, and I never can believe that fish can tell the difference; perhaps I may be wrong." Yet he afterwards says: "The finer you fish for roach the greater will be your success. Small floats, small hooks, and shot must be used; fish near the bottom, occasionally varying the depth, should the fish leave off biting. Bottom fishing is often interrupted by some fish of prey; in this case a bait thrown in for him will often remove the difficulty."



## CHAPTER IV.

WINDS—SEASONS—WINTER—SUMMER—TEMPERATURE—SPAWNING—  
TIME—WEATHER—SNOW—WATER—SNOW—CHOICE OF SWIM—  
DEPTH TO FISH—FISHING IN FLOODS—RAKING—LEDGERING—  
TIGHT CORKING—DISTURBANCE BY JACK—ROVING FOR ROACH—  
BITING AT END OF SWIM—FEEDING—STRIKING—SIMPLICITY OF  
ROACH.

**Winds.**—

“When the wind is in the east  
’Tis neither good for man nor beast ;”

and the rhymster might have added roach. Indeed, if it could be worse, it is when a dash of northerly wind is intermixed therewith. In fact, wind in general, by agitating the surface of the water, is always detrimental to roach fishing, as then the fine bites of the larger fish are scarcely perceptible—that is, scarcely perceptible to the eye of the general angler—but to the practised observation of the experienced roach fisher, the peculiar touch which arrests the float, even when the water is tolerably rough, and always when it is, but a mere ripple, is as obvious and palpable as when the water is perfectly placid.

**Season.**—“The season for fishing for roach in the Thames begins about the latter end of August, and continues much longer than it is either pleasant or safe to fish. It requires some skill to hit the time of taking them exactly; for, all the summer long, they live on the weed, which they do not forsake for the deeps till it becomes putrid, and that is sooner or later, according as the season is wet or dry; for you are to know that much rain hastens the rotting of the weed.”—*Sir J. Hawkins.*

**Winter.**—“Next, let me tell you, you shall fish for the roach in winter with paste or gentles; in April with worm or caddis; in the very hot months, with little white snails, or with flies under water, for he seldom takes them at the top, though the dace will. In many of the hot

months roach may also be caught thus : take a May-fly or ant-fly, sink him with a little lead to the bottom, near to the piles or posts of a bridge ; or near to any posts of a weir ; I mean any deep place where roach lie quietly, and then pull your fly up very leisurely, and usually a roach will follow your bait up to the very top of the water, and gaze on it there, then swim at and take it, lest the fly should fly away from him.”—*Ibid.*

“In the Lea, Thames, and other rivers, roach will feed in the middle of warm days all through the winter, if the water be in good condition—that is, not too much coloured. A good deal depends upon the wind and weather at all times of the year. If the day be bright and fine, and the wind in the north or east, you will be sure to have very little sport ; or if the day be raw and cold, you will not take many. A south, south-east, or south-west wind is best, all the year round, and if the water be then in order, you will be almost sure of sport. A lowering day, with a gentle breeze and a little soft rain, is always best for roach fishing.”—*Rev. J. Martin.*

We have invariably found the winter months, taking our roach fishing all in all, to be the best time, more particularly after considerable rises of the rivers from rains, and when the earth brought off the land has begun to deposit and leave the water of a medium colour. It is now the largest roach seek the deeps, and having no longer a variety of weed, and the various animalculæ that breed therein to feed upon, they have little or no choice but to accept the food offered them by the angler, which they do in a grateful manner, best shown by their presence in the basket of their donor.

**Summer.**—In the hotter months, the angler for roach cannot be up at his sport too early, and if he commences when morn is just breaking, and leaves off, say two or three hours after, he will have taken time by the forelock, fish by the gills, and the cream of the day for his health’s sake. We think but little of evening fishing, in comparison to that of the morning. The fact is, nearly all the best fish feed at night, and thus the angler by his attendance at the stream when the sun is first dispelling the mists of the meadows, finds his prey upon these short nights still engaged, and making up for lost time by what to them may be more a requisite supper than a superfluous repast. If,

however, the roach fisher is so attached to his pursuit that he cannot forego the fascination of the sport in the heat of the day, let him, if he can, find some dashing, lively bit of water—those of weirs, waste sluices, mill-tails, for instance—and fish in the eddies, or more quiet selvages of these agitated currents.

**Spawning Time.**—As April and May are the spawning months of the roach, they should be scrupulously protected from destruction by every means, during those and the preceding month. The true roach fisher should feel that by sparing them during these months, he is adding immensely to the stock from which his future takes are to come; and all clubs, professing however slightly the encouragement of the sport, should discountenance the practice of showing roach at these periods by fines imperatively imposed.

**Time of Biting.**—“Roach bite best in the summer season, from about four in the morning till nine in the forenoon, and from four in the afternoon till sunset. In the winter they will bite from ten in the forenoon till three in the afternoon, observing to let your tackle drag on the bottom, for they will take it more freely on the bottom than shallower.”

We knew an old cobbler at Ware, who was as fortunate as any man in the county amongst the roach. He used to frequent a public house not far from the stream, and nothing would induce him to go to the river's bank until certain things—difficult to ascertain, indeed never discovered by our little coterie—influenced him, and then even in the middle of a pipe of tobacco, or a pint of ale, he would start up and off, and the fact the most striking (no pun is meant) was, that although the anglers who had persistently essayed their various swims, had caught nothing until then, they would call out “Here comes the cobbler, we shall have them now.” We have had several gossips with this man, and although we verily believe he was most anxious to help us to arrive at the why and the wherefore of his curious behaviour, he could not explain the causes which instinctively kept him from throwing his time away, and as certainly signalled him to be at work. One fact he told us which doubtless contributed to his success. He said whenever the smoke was uncertain, now blowing one way and now another, now going up straight, and then in

down draughts, it was little use taking rod in hand for roach: he said then was the best time for perch. Another half suggestion, which he could scarcely realize, was a sort of faith in all attendant and surrounding circumstances, a whispering that he must not keep the roach waiting, and strange enough he always got a basket of from 9lb. to 12lb; small, it will be said, but then he would leave off from the same motive which impelled him to begin, and thus his aggregate takes as placed against the time occupied were something that left all of us far behind. We believe that Faith here, as in other matters, attached to a strong conviction of the ability to do, is at the bottom of many of those happy results in angling, which all our intellectual faculties cannot otherwise account for.

**Temperature.**—A friend writes: "Much of the pleasure of roach fishing—as does the pleasure of every other description of angling—arises from its uncertainty, and in this respect it ought to be the most pleasurable pursuit, for it is assuredly the most precarious of all fishing. The most favourable-looking weather has oftentimes produced no results, and on the contrary, when all appeared dead against success, a basket or bag has been filled to repletion with fat and handsome roach." These facts arise from causes which are at present a sealed book to the angler, but which, we are persuaded, would not long remain so if the angler would bring a little of that patience and thought to bear upon the conditions of the water and the atmosphere, which he does upon the whole of his fishing paraphernalia. The man who leaves a joint of his rod, his bait-box, or his plummet at home is universally voted a careless fellow, and a bore to others, from whom he is compelled to borrow. Yet a knowledge of the different causes which affect the feeding of fish is quite as essential as the possession and fitness of the tackle wherewith to take them. As at times all the skill and perseverance in the world will not bring them to hook, so might a man, if he possessed the requisite powers of discernment, avoid the loss of time involved in hopeless, if not vexatious occupation by the water side. And yet we are perfectly certain that to arrive at an approximation to this desirable knowledge, needs but a little joint effort amongst anglers. We cannot, indeed, see any difficulty, and if the clubs would cause the temperature of the several waters to be recorded by the mem-

bers visiting such angling resorts on the same day, together with the results of takes, much of the ground of uncertainty which now surrounds fishing would be cleared away.

It may be urged that this very uncertainty is the charm of angling. We admit it to a great extent, and we need not be afraid but there will ever be enough mystery in the art to keep an active mind on the alert for fresh discoveries. It is the thorough ignorance we are in respecting so much that has to be deplored, we need never fear learning too much of nature's secrets.

Mr. Bailey observes on this head: "Some four or five years ago, I visited London for the purpose of fishing the Thames and Lea, &c. From the fact of the roach not taking the worm in either river (it being in the summer time), I felt satisfied it was owing to the temperature of the water. Since that time, and more especially on my second visit, I procured a small pocket thermometer, for the purpose of ascertaining the temperature, and I always carry it with me on my fishing excursions. I have no hesitation in saying that this article will prove a most useful addition to an angler's equipment, and no fisherman ought to go without one, for this reason. No doubt some of my readers can remember a day when the finny tribe bit freely, and a basketful of fish was the result of the day's sport, and on the next day, without any visible change, it was impossible to persuade the fish to bite at all. You puzzle your brains to get at the cause of this, but all to no purpose. You are successful one day, and on the next, beaten on your merits, because a sudden change has taken place which the eye could not detect; but the thermometer might have cleared up the mystery by showing you that the water was five or six degrees colder to-day than it was yesterday. This alone would be quite sufficient to stop the fish from biting, especially if you treat them both days alike. Now, if the angler would apply the thermometer a few times, both on his successful days and blank ones, and enter the result in his pocket-book, he would in a short time be able to tell whether the fish were likely to bite or not; and, as regards ground bait, he would know what quantity to throw in, according to the temperature of the water."

Mr. Bailey writes in *July*: "The success or non-success

entirely depends on the rod-fisher's judgment in the selection of suitable swims for the time of the year, for if he attempts to fish deep, sluggish waters, so sure will he return home with an empty basket. As I stated last week, fast swims for the present are the most likely places to find all fish."

**Weather.**—The weather has been supposed, and with much reason, to influence all fish in their feeding, but we think from many observations that this is more to be attributed to sudden changes than to any particular wind, however unfavourable. We have often found the fish bite well after a long continuance of northerly or easterly winds, but seldom when a violent or sudden change occurred, even to a favourable quarter. Fish seem to become aware of, and to foresee and dread changes, even as in sea-fishing they will leave off biting some hours before the advent of an easterly wind.

**Snow Water.**—Our own experience has shown that fish will not feed at all when the snow water is dominant in the rivers, &c., but that while snow lies upon the ground, provided there is no thaw, roach do not fall off in their appetite, but on the contrary, more particularly under the influence of a north wind, sometimes become very ravenous.

**Snow.**—We recollect an old Chelsea pensioner, one Mike Haveley, who, as soon as the snow commenced falling, would put off from the Hospital stairs and fish opposite to Watney's distillery, at Wandsworth, and his takes of roach were equal to, if they did not exceed, any that had been exhibited at the piscatorial clubs during the whole season. He fished with dead gentles, which had been submitted when alive to a toughening process by being soaked in vinegar, and afterwards baked slightly in an oven. The gentles by this treatment became swollen and elongated, and appeared therefore larger on the hook, their internals being solidified, and not escaping, as is the case with the moist and semi-liquid stomach of the gentle under ordinary circumstances.

"Give me snow for roach fishing," Mike used to say; "the big 'uns then comes out, and are always in the best condition. P'raps they thinks, as the flakes fall, that them be crumbs of bread, and are some'at disappointed at not seeing them sink as usual, so takes the bait more

eager like. But whether this 'ere is so or not," Mike would add, "I know they bites best when the snow is falling, and almost as well when it lays on the ground, but never at all when it melts into the water."

H. W., in a brochure on "Roach Fishing and its Peculiarities," alludes to these contradictory facts, and mentions two which occurred to himself. In the month of February he had a day's roach fishing with Mr. George Willis in Hertfordshire, and they had good sport within two rods' length of each other. A heavy fall of snow for three hours prevented fishing till the afternoon; the same sport was then again tried, and the result was sixty pounds weight of fine roach and dace with the two rods. In the other case he was in Hertfordshire, with Mr. Joseph Fenn, junr., after ten days of intensely hot weather in July. If anything, this day was hotter than any day that had preceded it. For several hours the finest roach and dace fishing was had—the bait being gentles—till dusk, and really long after the float was invisible, they were rewarded by taking remarkably fine roach. His friend returned to London, leaving Mr. W. and the keeper of the fishery, Robert Brown; the latter said, "This is something like roach fishing, sir; if you like to fish all night I shall be happy to stay and land the fish, such prime fish too." But, like a fool, he went to bed, and has never been happy since. At a very early hour the next morning he fished at the same swim, and for an hour and a half had the same good sport; but when the sun had fairly risen, and had full power, he could not get a bite there or anywhere else. The fish were gone, but where to he could not discover.

Thus a heavy fall of snow, as we have shown in the instance of the Chelsea pensioner, and could name many others, is not prejudicial to roach angling until the snow dissolves; and roach biting well after a long continuance of heat, and even of north-easterly wind, is far from an uncommon occurrence. There was nothing singular in the fact that anglers could not get a bite there or anywhere else when the sun had fairly risen, and had full power, because that is the rule and not the exception; the only surprise is that the fish bit during the heat of the first day; but that is partly disposed of. And the somewhat naïve observation that, after so many hours of

remarkably fine fishing, which extended into the gloom of the night, and was continued next morning with equal success, until the sun had full power, he, Mr. W., found the fish were gone, but where to he could not discover. Now supposing Mr. W. and his friend took 60 lb. of roach on this day, and say 10 lb. the next morning, and these roach averaged half a pound apiece—a fair estimate,—we have one hundred and forty individual fish, a pretty good haul, even for a net, for a quarter of a mile of water. If then Mr. W. had thought of looking into his basket he might readily have solved the problem, which seems so much to have puzzled this gentleman, as to where the roach had gone to.

**Choice of Swim.**—"The water may be too discoloured for the fish to see a bait when on the move, but it may not, after all, be too thick provided a suitable place be selected. This is one of the great secrets of success in angling, for, if the rod fisher has no idea where to find his fish in high water as well as low, his chance of sport is but a poor one. And again, the angler ought to know the speed of the swim most suitable for the particular fish he is in pursuit of, because all fish shift their quarters according to the time of the year and state of the weather. To fish on the shallow side of the river in high water is quite right; but to fish a rapid water after a frosty night and a quick stream when the water is much discoloured, is wrong, and just the reverse of what ought to be. In both cases a gentle stream, with sufficient depth of water to suit height and colour, will always be found a certainty."—*Burley*.

Although we are strongly opposed to the custom of many anglers who, first arriving at running water that is new to them, sit down at once and attach themselves to any likely swim that presents itself, we are equally assured of the imprudence of those who are constantly changing from one place to another. What we recommend to the angler for roach is to walk quietly along the banks with his rod line and plumb in his hand, trying the depths carefully here and there, and remarking the more likely attractions of each spot, and after this is done, say for half a mile if his permission to fish extends thus far, he should select that which he considers the best according to his judgment, and there take up his station. There let



him continue to fish, and not get shifty if the roach do not come on the feed in an hour or so. They will find out his ground bait by and by, and as roach swim in numbers up and down the stream, seldom keeping in one place for any length of time unless they find peculiar attractions, he may rely upon their visiting him sooner or later, and once amongst them he may thin their ranks, and make room for another shoal. We are the more impressed with the value of this systematic course of conduct from repeated trials in company with other anglers. The fidgety and erratic fishermen, having tried here, there, and everywhere, have got a roach or two out of this hole, and one or more out of that, and thus persuaded themselves that they were doing wonders, and that their baskets would rival those of men they saw fixed and almost motionless between their favourite alders; but the arrival at the inn or railway station has dispelled this delusion, and he who took time in his selection of a swim, and then was constant to his choice, has invariably beaten his coquettish brethren, both in weight and numbers. Of course there are exceptions to even this rule: the water may fall or rise, and thus alter the set of the swim—a most important consideration,—for if, for instance, the float is carried bankward into shoal water, or towards and into a bed of weeds, the angler would scarcely be justified in adhering to the place under such circumstances.

**Clearing Swim.**—It may often happen that a most desirable swim presents itself, but that its otherwise attractive qualities are neutralized by one or more roots of weeds, a piece of sunken wood, &c. In such case the place should be well cleared out and left for awhile to settle. In this way, whilst anglers have wearied themselves by walking up and down the banks looking out for a likely spot, we have gone to work at once, either by wading in warm weather, where the spot has been secluded, or by the aid of a small grapnel and cord, removed what was probably the only impediment to the even course of our line. The best swims are those that come off a swift scour, and then deepen and remain even for about twenty yards or more, terminating in a gentle rise. It is at this rise where the ground bait is impeded and the roach are found taking it as it is gently rolled up hill by the current. But while the angler knows that it is there that

fish most do congregate, he must fish for them from as great a distance as he conveniently can, or if, on the contrary, he attempts to approach or overreach them, they will be off in a moment, and all his labour will be in vain. This, indeed, is the great art of angling, and it cannot be too often insisted upon. Take it for granted that what fish are in the stream, are, as a matter of course, somewhere, and as you may be certain they will not come where you are if they know it, the necessity for the greatest caution and quiet is at once apparent. There is very little that anglers differ so much upon as the effectiveness of particular baits, but as many of these lures have proved themselves equally attractive in various hands, we are disposed to believe that the success of a particular bait is due as much to the style of fishing pursued by the angler, as to the bait itself. For instance, those who use pastes, as a general rule, have a very quick eye; absolutely necessary to meet the bite of the fish, or bait and hook are rejected and blown out as soon as touched. In the absence of this optic gift, the angler who is less deft, loses the opportunity that the slight movement of the float has given him, strikes too late, shakes off in all probability his pill of paste, and blames both fish and bait instead of his own want of skill. He then perhaps takes to worms, by which, if the roach are on the feed, he is successful, because the nimble hand and perceptive eye is not so much required by the latter process.

**Depth to Fish.**—We differ from many first-rate roach fishers as to the distance the bait should be from the bottom, many contending for four or five inches, according to the depth of the water, while others insist upon an inch. An inch is certainly getting very close, and it would seem like splitting hairs to suggest a yet closer approximation, but this we do, if the bottom be perfectly level, free from large stones, weeds, and of fine gravel or sand. Indeed we would rather the bait slightly dragged than not be close upon the ground. Some of the best anglers in reply to this tell us that roach can see better above than below them. This may be granted, but we have watched too intimately the habits of roach not to know that roach, bream, and carp, very often when they are actively on the feed, have their tails higher than their heads, and their vision directed to the bottom.

The general rule in the river Lea is to let the bait just touch the ground; but we have frequently found that they will take it, at certain times, much better two or three inches above it, though at others they will not touch it unless it be on the ground. You must, therefore, use your own judgment according to the feeding of the fish, for they do not feed in all waters, places, and times alike. Generally, however, you take the largest fish with the bait on the bottom.

"During very warm weather, roach occasionally swim near the surface of the water, and will then, sometimes, take the bait—if a house-fly—at mid-water, better than at bottom; but this does not often occur, therefore always begin to fish with the bait slightly dragging or touching the bottom. After trying this way without success, you may then angle at mid-water; and you may also fish at various depths when angling in a tidal river, during the time the tide is making, and until high water. And further note, when angling in rivers and streams, especially for roach, make choice of a swim that is shoal at the end of it, because, as the ground-bait separates, it drifts down the stream, and will lodge there, and keep the fish from going further; and the baited hook will also touch the bottom all the way, but if the end of the swim is deeper than the top or beginning, your baited hook will not then be at a proper depth, which is material, as roach generally bite at the end of the swim, especially if the water is shallow or bright."—*Salter*.

"You should occasionally take the depth again, particularly if the fish leave off feeding, which they will do if you have lost the proper depth. This happens in rivers from the water rising or falling from tides, opening locks, mills, &c.; and sometimes from the line drawing through the caps of the floats. Your success, indeed, materially depends on fishing to an inch, or even less."—*Ibid*.

Mr. Bailey tells us: "Get the proper depth, and fish so that your bait may swim two or three inches from the bottom, never on it, for you must bear in mind that roach can see better above than below them." He afterwards says, in fishing with the dew-worm, "Get the depth so as to allow your bait just to miss the bottom."

**Frost.**—"I have," writes Mr. Bailey, "caught roach in every month of the winter, when the water was as clear as gin, and freezing sharp."

**Fishing in Floods.**—We have taken some of the finest roach during floods, when few, if any, anglers would think it worth while to put their rods together. The places we select upon these occasions are in miniature bays with a grass bottom, in one to three feet of water, baiting with a gentle, red worm, or the tail of a lob-worm; or at the entrance to ditches, provided the water be quiet. No better places, however, can be selected, when the water is rising, than a drain or ditch that is running into the main stream. Here the fish instinctively congregate to feed upon the food that is washed down by the flood, and here the angler is almost sure of sport. Close in and under banks with a slow current, are likely places, but they require to be approached with a light foot.

February is undoubtedly the best month of the year for roach fishing in all waters. We, however, prefer October for its geniality, the former month being most uncertain, and if true to its name of "fill-dyke," will present the angler with thick turbid waters, and cold chilly mists, always great drawbacks—whatever may be the result in *avoidsupois*—to the full enjoyment of angling.

**Raking** is an excellent plan, not alone for gudgeon, but for roach, dace, and chub angling, and it has of late years very considerably contributed to the success of the angler. The method of using the rake upon these occasions differs from that pursued for gudgeon, which, for the latter, is made to pass over the gravel, and to disturb the exact spot fished upon. Not so in the present case. Here the punt man takes his stand on the up-side of the punt, and agitating the bottom above, sends down and under the punt the deposit, which allures the fish within reach of the line. M. M. says: "I think it answers well to rake over the swim before commencing. If the raking be confined to the upper side of the boat there is danger of the fish heading up above the angler's line. Fish are not alarmed by a moderate disturbance of the bottom in a stream. I have frequently had excellent sport when hooked on to a dredging barge with an engine of twenty-horse power in full work."

**Ledgering for Roach.**—Mr. T. R. Sachs, in the *Field*, November 21, 1868, in speaking of the ill success others had had amongst the roach, says: "I was at Streatley a fortnight since, accompanied by two others, and caught a

good many roach, all large. We used a gut ledger, a good-sized perch hook two feet from the bullet, and baited with the tail of a lob-worm, or rather a lob-worm with the head nipped off. The ground-bait consisted of lob-worms cut up small and thrown in by handfuls, without clay. The spot chosen was a quiet, deep eddy, so that the ground-baits remained on the spot. We did not strike at the first, but at the second or third tug, according to the pull of the fish; for you must remember we had a large bait for a small mouth. Quiet in the punt is necessary; no getting up and shaking about, or the fish will flock off elsewhere. By this method another member of the Piscatorial Society and myself succeeded, some four years since, in basketing in one day 75lbs. weight of roach, and a tench of three pounds. Thirty of the roach weighed upwards of a pound each."

We cannot recommend the old plan of ledgering with a line running through a coffinlead, but when circumstances will not allow the use of a float, we use one fitted up in the following manner. The lead should be flat and triangular, if fishing at all across stream; if fishing down stream a bullet will answer, to which the end of the running line is made fast. A fine gut bottom, about three feet long, is looped to the line, about six or eight inches above the lead, which latter may be from  $\frac{1}{4}$  oz. to 1 oz. in weight, but should *never* be heavier than absolutely necessary.

**Tight Corking in the Nottinghamshire Style.**—This is a most killing mode of fishing for barbel, bream, and roach, in water of almost any depth where the current is gentle. A large swan quill float is used, fine line, a few very large shot several inches apart, the nearest one eighteen inches or two feet from the hook. The bait used is generally a lob-worm, or the tail of one; sometimes greaves or cheese. The line is left from three to five feet longer than the depth of water. The bait is thrown down stream, and then allowed to take its own position, the top of the rod being kept perfectly still. The extra length of line should be so proportioned that the lowest, or two lowest shot, remain on the ground, the float being in a slanting position. This, in fact, constitutes a very delicate but effective style of ledgering.

**Disturbance by Jack.**—Most roach fishers have been annoyed at times by jack dashing in among the roach collected by the attractions of ground-bait. But in good

roach waters the presumed unwelcome intrusion of jack has its advantages as well as its disadvantages. True, the angler is occasionally annoyed while playing a roach at having a jack seize it for a time, and it may be break away with both roach and hair hook. This has often occurred to us, and upon one occasion at Byfleet Mill tail, we had three visits of this nature in less than an hour, but it is always in the power of the angler to fit up a bait and hook as a lie-bye for such gentlemen if he so desires it. For our own part we see much good in their presence, particularly if you are fishing with strong gut tackle, as they keep away the small fry of minnows and juvenile chub, roach, and dace which generally infest the best swims. The fact that the big fish continue to feed in spite of the proximity of Master Jack, is the best proof of what we say, and if you take this bugbear or boggy to the infant fins out, you will assuredly have the whole nursery back again. There is another error in reference to roach, which to us appears to be more prevalent than it ought to be with the great opportunities for observation which almost every visit to the river affords to the angler. We allude to the notion that roach are scared at the approach of pike, or rather that they never consort together. Nothing can be farther from the truth than this. We have seen jack hundreds of times—yes, we say hundreds of times—lying perfectly still with a shoal of roach above, below, and around him, each member of the school fearlessly swimming over and under their enemy, and close before his jaws. We mentioned this circumstance to the late Colonel Wood, the member for Middlesex, and had fortunately an opportunity soon after, from the bridge over the lake at Littleton, to convince him of a fact which had taken all his credulity to accept on our simple assertion. "There," said we to the Colonel and our party, "is a jack of full five pounds lying amongst those water lilies. You may now see the roach in every direction around him, and they certainly appear to be destitute of the slightest fear of his presence." This was, after a while, acceded to by all present, to their no little wonderment. "Now we will show you what will arouse Mr. Luce to action," and calling the old keeper who was in charge of a kettle of live-bait, we took a goodly roach, and giving him a fillip with our finger, so as partly to disable it, we threw it amongst the

shoal, splash dash. The pike seized the offering, and retired with it across its mouth into the weeds quietly to pouch it. "But why," asked Sir F. P., who was present, "did he not help himself to one of those about him, if he were really in need of a meal?" "Because," was the simple reply, "unless hard pressed, no fish of prey indulges in the luxury of a purely healthy fish, its mission being to anticipate both death and putrescence."

My friend, M. M., differs from me slightly on this question. He says: "It is not so much a matter of health and disease, as of disablement. If a fish be maimed, half killed, or hampered in its movements by being attached to a hook and line, it is crippled, and becomes an easy booty. All animals of prey avoid a chase if they can obtain their food on easier terms."

**Fishing for Roach.**—"Roach are sometimes taken without a float. This manner of fishing is only to be practised with a stiff light rod, and a swan shot placed on the line about six inches from the hook, letting the shot touch the bottom, then gradually raising it to the required depth. This way is generally practised round the piles of bridges, and from wood work, or from a barge or boat."—*Salter*.

**Ant-fly.**—"During July and August roach may be taken in the following manner, with an ant-fly or house-fly, and also a cad, and sometimes with a gentle. Put on No. 11 hook and single hair line to a fine rod; put one small shot on about four inches above the hook, to sink the bait, then draw the baited hook gently or slowly up to the surface of the water, and so continue until you feel a bite. The roach generally takes the bait as it approaches the top. When fishing this way, try round piles, bridges, flood-gates and deep, still holes, where bushes and trees grow over the water."—*Ibid*.

**Biting at End of Swim.**—Roach fishing has been brought to very great perfection, more particularly in the Lea and Thames. The Nottingham and Norfolk anglers, however, pride themselves upon their skill in this particular, but one and all appear to have learned many valuable wrinkles not known to the roach fishermen of old. One of these is as follows:—When the line is at the end of a swim the float is checked, the line below the float slants, the bait floats forward, and is actually further from the ground than at any other part of the swim. It rises,

therefore, upwards, and is suspended for a while some inches above the shelf which terminates the swim. It is on these shelves the ground-bait lodges, and the under-current being checked by the rise in the bottom, gives to the fish that are collected a better chance of feeding quietly; and it is at this spot, therefore, that punt fishers for roach so often, in making a final strike, find—although they were not conscious of a bite—that they have hooked a fish.

**Roach-bite.**—The bite of a roach, more particularly if he be of any weight, and in slowly running water, is indicated by so slight a movement of the float as to be perfectly imperceptible to the tyro, who may be watching for it by the side of a first-class roach fisher. The latter at the instant, however, with his well educated eye, has perceived the touch, and by an instant movement, varying in character according to the length and weight of the rod, the fish is secured. It is here that experience and skill make themselves most manifest to the uninitiated. The line of single hair; the hook of a dainty kind; the rod of fourteen or sixteen feet, reaching out beyond the ken of many sights, and the bite so fine; nay, as I have said, to some imperceptible, creates astonishment if not admiration in the non-instructed, and sends him away in despair that the art he loves is apparently so far beyond his longing reach.

There is nothing more instructive to a young beginner than to sit upon a bank and, if sufficiently near, patiently watch the angling operations of a good fisherman and his inexperienced companion, catching roach from a punt. At first the observer is struck with the fact that the one takes more fish than the other, and he marvels that, each having the same description of tackle, baits, and depth of swim, the fisherman is ever the master. They change seats and rods, with still the same results. Surely, fancies the observer, they would both have the same number of bites, although they did not catch the same number of fish. But down goes the float of the fisherman at every two or three swims, and up comes a fish; the float of the other sails away, time after time, and, like an ill-instructed village lass, proudly refuses to bob. But see, the watchful spectator has found out something. He notices that at one particular spot, a certain distance from the punt, the fisherman checks for an instant the career of his float.



No, it is not an accident, for he does it at every swim, and it is there he invariably gets his bites. "I see it!" mentally exclaims the delighted looker-on, and he rises, thinking such a wrinkle is sufficient for the time, and ruminates over his accession of knowledge as he wades through the flowery meads on his homeward way. "I see it," again he says to himself; "the more timid and larger fish keep a misty distance from the punt—a distance at which the ground bait gets broken into welcome pieces,—and it is at that exact spot, ascertained by experience, the practised hand checks the bait, and thus not only gives the fish a better opportunity of seizing it, but causes it to rise slightly from the ground, upon which it has been almost dragging, and thus drop as it were into the mouths of his victims."

"It is a good plan in still waters, especially when they are very fine on the feed, to raise your float now and then four or five inches out of the water, several times, and then let it settle, for if anything will tempt them to take the bait it is that manœuvre. We have frequently been fishing for them when we could not get a fish in any other way: they see the bait moving and are excited to take it."—*Rev. J. Martin.*

This suggestion to watch the actions of others is peculiarly applicable to the Nottingham style of angling. In fishing with the Nottingham tackle, the line, float, and bait should be nearly as free as the current, and run almost at its pace. The Nottingham line is therefore absolutely necessary for this purpose, as its extremely light weight between the top joint and the float only very slightly retards the progress of the latter—a circumstance which is considered by many good anglers rather favourable than otherwise, as, if anything, the bait should precede the float; for, if it follow it, it becomes very awkward for the fish to seize it without coming in contact with the line; and then, of course, if it is a fish of discernment, which generally means size, he will at once leave it. The line should be kept as much out of the water as possible, as wet increases its weight and liability to cling to the rod.

**Feeding.**—Mr. Marriott is of opinion that fish, while horizontally poised in the water, have the excelsior gifts of looking only forwards and upwards, for he tells us that "the fish of the carp tribe—of which we are writing

—when feeding upon anything floating in the water, or that they expect will come to them with the stream, swim very near the bottom; almost in a horizontal position, and with the eyes pointing forwards and upwards, and they invariably seize a bait before it touches the bottom; but when looking for their food in the mud or gravel they incline at a very considerable angle—say of  $45^{\circ}$ —and in that way grovel and rout amongst the mud and stones, with their eyes looking downwards. The natural inference to deduce from these facts is that we ought to fish on, or above the bottom, according to the circumstances of each particular case, and not be guided by one blind rule.”

**Striking.**—A good deal of nonsense has been written about “striking with a delicate turn of the wrist.” We should like to see the man who could do it with an eighteen, much less a twenty or twenty-four feet rod. The fact is, even the strongest Lea fishermen lift their heavy rods bodily, as they are held in both hands; but when light rods of moderate length are used, the strike is from the wrist or elbow.

The true roach fisher is often a solitary banker by necessity; but if the beginner can obtain permission to stand by his elbow, and watch his movements, he will perceive how faint were those bites which proved fatal to the largest fish, and will likewise notice that the “strike” is as delicate as the bite, the line being little more than tightened; and if the angler does not feel the fish, he angles on—more particularly when baited with gentles—without taking his line out of the water; thus, by the exquisitely quiet nature of his treatment, saving his bait, the time which would be expended in the removal of the line, the readjustment of the hook, and what is of yet greater consequence, he has preserved the placidity of the water, and has not excited the suspicion of the fish.

**Simplicity of the Roach.**—All experienced anglers will agree with Blakey in his “Hints on Angling,” that however simple or foolish the small fry of roach may be during the summer, and in turbid or thick waters, the larger fish are unquestionably timid, shy, cunning fellows, undeserving the reproach cast upon them by so high an authority as Walton. It is, indeed, very difficult to catch a large roach, in bright water, unless you use very fine tackle, and carefully keep yourself out of sight.

## CHAPTER V.

"Then see on yonder side, where one doth sit,  
 With line well twisted, and his hook but small;  
 His cork not big, his plummets round and fit,  
 His bait of finest paste a little ball,  
 Wherewith he doth intice unto the bit,  
 The careless *roach*, that soone is caught withall;  
 Within a foot the same doth reach the ground,  
 And with least touch, the float straight sinketh down.

"So for the *roach*, more baits he hath beside,  
 As of a sheep, the thick congealed bloud,  
 Which on a board, he useth to divide  
 In portions small, to make them fit and good,  
 That better on his hooke they may abide;  
 And of the waspe, the white and tender brood,  
 And worms, that breed on every herb and tree,  
 And sundry flies, that quick and lively bee."  
*Secrets of Angling, by J. D., Esq., 1652.*

BAITS—CONTENTS OF STOMACH—PASTES—BOILED WHEAT—PEARL-BARLEY—COCKCHAFFER-GRUB—PERIWINKLES—MUSSELS—SHRIMPS LOB, OR DEW-WORM—RED-WORM—GENTLES—CHRYSLIS, OR RED GENTLE—TRIPE—PORK-SKIN—SUBSTITUTE FOR GENTLE—CADDIS, OR CADBAIT—WASP-GRUB—MEAL-WORM—FRESH WATER SHRIMP—SILK-WEED—PARASITES—NATURAL FLIES—GRASSHOPPER—ARTIFICIAL FLIES—METHODS OF BAITING.

**Baits.**—"In April, cads and worms; in summer, white snails or flies; in autumn, paste; in winter, gentles, sprouted malt, the young brood of wasps, bees dipt in blood, and the dried blood of sheep."—W. A. Osbaldiston's *British Sportsman*.

**Contents of Stomach.**—We have frequently insisted upon the necessity of the angler ascertaining the contents of the stomach of the first roach he may catch. By opening the fish with a sharp penknife, he may satisfy his curiosity as to what they are feeding upon, and this may

guide him to a great extent. If the greater portion of the contents of the stomach be grubs, or worms, then gentles or worms will be the bait in harmony with the inclination of the fish; if they have been feeding on weed, then paste, or the silk-weed, if procurable, will probably agree with their appetites. Where a preponderance of flies and grubs is met with, house and other flies, beetles, &c. will be acceptable.

We recollect opening a roach on the banks of the Loddon, near Twyford, in October, when the fish bit very sparingly, and found therein several Harry, or daddy long legs. As these insects were most abundant in the meadows, we had no difficulty with our landing net in securing as many as we required, and the sport we had—fishing with them under water, and at the bottom,—was as good as we ever experienced in that river.

A large portion of the pleasure of all sport is caused by the novelty that can be imported into it. What we are surprised at is, that the float fisher should be so slow to bring to bear upon his art that thought and induction by which the best of fly fishermen are characterized, who, directly they take their first trout or grayling, inquisitively operate to ascertain the secrets of the store within the fish. We are inclined to believe that some fish are almost confirmed vegetarians, and that the heavier they get, the more attached they are to the weed. It is certainly true that, in many waters, roach, in the hot autumnal months, like ourselves, prefer a simple cool salad to all the attractions of animal food.

**Paste.**—The Rev. J. Martin says: “Roach at different seasons of the year, and in different waters, will take various kinds of baits; worms, gentles, grubs, blood-worms, may all be used, if anglers feel disposed to try them, but for our own part we never use anything but paste. In the Lea, in the spring, sometimes blood-worms may be used with advantage, and in the summer gentles at Dagenham, &c., but even then we always use paste in preference. We should not indeed consider that we were roach fishing in the Lea if we were not using paste. To make it really good the bread must be the best, about one day old, not more nor less: be particular in that respect, for if it be too new your paste will be too sticky, and not white, and if it be too stale, it will be too loose to hold on

the hook. When at the waterside, and not till then—for it spoils in a short time,—take a piece out of the middle of the loaf, in a square shape, about as big as a large walnut, dip it into the water, and take it out again as quickly as possible, and as quickly squeeze all the water out of it, or it will become too wet, and never mix well. Having done that, put it into the palm of your left hand, and work it up with the thumb and finger of your right, until it is quite solid, smooth, and white; it will then be fit for the hook, and should be kept from the action of the air, for that turns its colour; and to prevent that we always put it into a small clean piece of white rag, and keep it in the left-hand waistcoat pocket, from whence we take it, piece by piece, as we want it. If you fish some hours, and find that it has become discoloured, make a fresh piece by all means, or your finny companions will not take it. Be sure that your hands are perfectly clean when you make it, or it will all be spoiled. The piece you put on the hook should be about the size of a white pea, and as round, and should be so placed on the hook, that the point should be just outside of the round pellet; be particular in that, or you will run a chance of not hooking your fish, especially if your paste be too stiff."

A French roll baked the day previous, or aerated bread, are preferred by some anglers. Paste made simply of flour should be avoided, as, however tough you may make it, it will gradually become flabby, and eventually so soft and sticky as to be perfectly useless; soddening upon the hook until it drops off by its own weight.

In kneading the moistened bread to make paste, it is as well to place it in a piece of clean rag or a handkerchief, then by twisting the fabric you can thoroughly press out all the superfluous moisture, and you can then knead the mass—still in the handkerchief—to a proper consistency. A little cotton wool or rabbit fur is sometimes mixed with the paste, the better to insure its adhesion to the hook; but it ought not, if properly made, to require such aid, unless in strong currents.

We know not whether it has been an accidental coincidence, but we have noticed, that when we have placed a pellet of paste upon the hook, while our fingers have been wet with the slime of the last roach taken, we have not had long to wait for another bite.

We eschew all fanciful baits and scents, such as the fat of herons' legs, &c. We have tried some of these, as others have, and found them useless. "Babies' brains," "murderers' bones done to powder in a mortar," we confess we have not yet dared to "mix with flour to a proper consistency," as we should expect the voice of innocence to come from the first little fish we brought to shore, or be garotted by a huge and vicious pike, who mayhap in mortal form had "swung on Tyburn tree."

Next to pastes, either white or coloured, we look upon red worms as best, but there are occasions when natural flies will be eagerly taken upon the surface or below it. Again, with some anglers gentles have the first position all the year round, while the wasp-grub, straw-bait, cad-bait, boiled malt, wheat, rice, and pearl barley, have each their different advocates. The tail of the lob-worm and the red-worm should, however, always be tried when the water is slightly or even much coloured; in which case throw in a few chopped worms now and then, but do not overdo it. While the fish are biting well be contented, and if they leave off, give them another dozen or so. Indeed, if the fish will bite freely without all this petting and coaxing, so much the better. When fishing with gentles, a few sparingly thrown in are quite sufficient, provided the bleak are not present in numbers, when these fish will seize the sinking gentles almost at the surface. Should you find that this petty larceny is going on, get a lump of clay and put a dozen or so of gentles therein, which will carry them to the bottom, and they will soon escape through the clay to become the prey of the larger fish, who will swim about the ball of clay, expectant of greater store than it really possesses.

Should the bleak become annoying, the best plan to get rid of them for a time is to throw a little dry bran upon the surface of the stream, when all the small fry will follow it. This may be repeated occasionally. Harry Crystall, an excellent roach and chub fisher, whenever troubled by bleak, takes a good-sized pellet of paste, and forming it into the shape of a cup, fills the cavity with dry bran; he puts the whole upon his hook, and as this bait sinks, it gives forth the sparkling portions of bran, which are carried down the stream, and attract the small fish. Thus while these fry are contending for the atoms, the

large roach perceiving the more valuable prize, dart through the occupied swarm and take it. No ground-bait is required by this method, but at the best, it is of course only fanciful.

In bank-fishing once at Culham, on the Thames, with the Hon. R. R., a very skilful roach fisher, we found ourselves beaten both in weight and number to a most shameful extent. He was fishing with a single hair line and light float similar to our own, and we watched him closely while he took a roach at nearly every swim. He was fishing with paste of a dirty colour, filliping every now and then a few pellets of it at his float, and then carefully returning the paste to a small side pocket in his shooting coat. We asked him, with an air of apparent indifference, for a small portion of his paste, a request which he good-humouredly declined, observing in doing so, that one of the fundamental rules of angling was to be independent of others, and therefore he advised us to make our own paste, pointing at the same time to his bag on the grass, in which we should find plenty of the crumb of bread. This awakened our suspicions, and we, watching our opportunity, with a playful show of banter, knocked the paste out of his hand, picked it up, and ran away with it. A glance at the lump sufficed, and it was as quickly returned to its owner. Now what did this observation afford?—that the half-digested contents of the stomach of a roach had been mixed up with the paste. We took the hint, and then, and often since then, we have had recourse to this expedient, and found it (although not invariably) effective.

There exists a wide difference of opinion amongst roach fishers as to the size of the paste bait that should be offered to the roach. But this must depend upon local considerations, the needful size of hook, and the average weight of the roach in the water to be fished. Still there are good roach anglers who adhere to the notion that a pellet the size of a small pea will suffice in all waters, but of this practice an old hand writes: "I disagree—and I am aware that I am in a glorious minority—with my brother roach fishers in the quantity, size, and shape which should form a paste bait for roach. I am aware that some barely cover the point of the hook with a small pearl of paste, others will imbed the whole of the hook therein, while a third class insert the hook in a piece of a pear-shape, as

large as the tip of your little finger. If it be true that in each case the angler finds his reward—the first taking many fry and bait, with seldom a fish worthy the catching; the second, average fish which may bear a general contrast with most takes; but it is the large bait, ‘the dollop of paste,’ as it is familiarly termed, that tempts the pound-and-half and two-pounders. But,” adds my friend, “in order to do this the ledger must be employed.”

Many paste anglers colour their bait with powder—vermilion, or carmine; the former is poisonous and should never be used, as there is little or no excuse for the preference, carmine for such a purpose being equally cheap, and far more readily amalgamated, besides being entirely innocent.

Honeycomb and flour, mixed together, make a nice paste; so tough and tenacious that the strongest streams will scarcely move it from the hook.

Early in the spring roach will take paste, as well as the small red worm, with great freedom. At this time they must be fished for in deep water, close under the bank, and near to the bottom.

Many bottom anglers compound their paste with great skill and care, and the well-fed fish become so dainty that unless these pastes are worked up with clean hands and pure materials, they will fail in their intent. The infinity of articles which used to enter the paste list are now reduced to very few; but enough remain to tempt every fish which takes a bait in this form. Pastes are liable to turn sour, or to become fetid, consequently it is necessary to renew them often. It has been common to unite with the substance of pastes a little fine cotton or rabbit's wool, to make them more readily adhere to the hook; but this we believe to be seldom necessary when either bread, dough, or flour is used, if the angler will knead them sufficiently.

**Cheese Paste.**—Stale bread and new cheese should be kneaded well together, and the same method applied with new bread, if the cheese be old. From either mixture, by long-continued kneading, an excellent adhesive paste may be made, which for winter fishing will be found a valuable bait: the new cheese and old bread for roach, and the old cheese and new bread for chub. “At least,” says Blain, “in our anglings, these varieties are proved to have answered the ends required.”



A paste, dignified by some London anglers with the name of the patent paste, is made by separating the starch of flour from the pure gluten. Knead any quantity of flour with cold water to the consistency of stiff dough, and let it remain for one hour. It should then be thoroughly but gently kneaded in repeated fresh waters, until the whole of the starch is removed and the gluten takes on the consistency of bird-lime, and will not whiten the water it is washed in. It must be placed in water, or surrounded with a very wet cloth, to keep it from hardening, and the fingers must be dipped into water before applying it on the hook, to which it adheres well, however strong the current. With this property it may be useful in such rapid waters as no other paste can withstand, but, on account probably of the abstraction of the starch, it proves greatly inferior to the more simple bread paste, in which the starch is preserved.

New bread paste is made by intimately kneading together in the hand for a few minutes, three-fourths of new, with one-fourth of stale bread, without dipping in water, but moistening slightly if necessary. This working will bring it into a very glutinous adhesive paste; it is particularly fitted therefore for angling in strong eddies and powerful streams; but it does not apply so well to the finer fishing for roach in moderate streams and still deeps, since it will not separate so readily from the hook as the paste made from stale bread; and this property of separating, the experienced roach fisher considers to be essential. This paste is convenient from the quickness with which it is made, which should be done at the water side to prevent its drying.

As all bread pastes have a tendency to become sour quickly, particularly if wetted, it is advisable, should the angler have some miles to travel, that he carry with him a small loaf or roll, which will enable him to make his paste, from time to time, as he requires it. The excellent paste before described, made of stale bread, might with great propriety be distinguished by the term "roach paste," as it is that which most professed roach anglers use, particularly those who fish from banks in still deeps. "With this paste," writes a well known bottom fisher, "a friend of ours used to bait his hook in his late winter fishings in the Lea (gentles supplied his hook in the more

early winter months). He was a most excellent roach fisher, and his preference of this paste arose from a full experience of its superiority over all others of the kind." "In the roach streams of the Thames," says Blain, "and some other rivers, new bread paste is occasionally preferred; but the readiness with which this of the stale bread is applied to the smallest roach hook, as No. 10, 11, or 12, and the little tendency it has, from being less tenacious and solid, to resist the entrance of the hook into the roach's mouth, makes it certainly the most preferable paste for these fish; and it is seldom they refuse it at any season."

In the application of paste to the hook, experience and dexterity are both required. It should be rolled into an oval form, and forced on the hook by pressing it into the hollow of the bend, so as completely to cover the whole of it, allowing the extreme point and the upper part of the shank only to appear, which latter should seem to spring from the centre of the mass. A little practice will itself teach the process, perhaps better than written instructions; which, however, are useful, as they first awaken the mind to the conviction of the necessity of being particular in these matters, and they also lessen the incipient difficulties of the practice. One caution we think necessary in regard to such pastes as are little adhesive, that in pressing them on the hook they be rather flattened than round, as giving a better hold of the wire.

Paste hooks should be whipped with white or scarlet silk, and afterwards varnished, that the contrast between the white paste and black whipping may not be too apparent. If the bend of the hook be whipped with a few turns of white sewing cotton it will be found to prevent the stale bread paste from so readily separating from the hook, which is very apt to occur in fine roach fishing.

We can recommend a paste made of one-fourth gluten, already described, and three-fourths stale bread, as being both palatable to the fish, and adhering well to the hook.

**Boiled Wheat** is a favourite bait with many anglers on the Trent and elsewhere. Take some fine white wheat, soak it in water for a night, and then rub it violently in a rough canvas bag, until the husk or bran is removed; then add some milk, or milk and water, and put it in a cool oven, or near a slow fire, so as to stew very gently. When

done enough it is allowed to cool, and will form a tolerably firm cake. The grains, which are easily separated, are about the size of a large gentle, one forming a bait on a small hook. Some prepare this bait without removing the husk, but it is better as above.

**Pearl Barley.**—With this we have also taken many roach in ponds and still waters.

Take the barley and simmer it gently (don't boil it), then when it is about three parts the size required, strain the water well away, and add fresh warm water to take off the gluten; pour off the second water, and then, thirdly, fill up with cold; let it simmer slowly for an hour, or hour and a half, which will make the barley as white as ivory. There is a core inside each grain, into which the barb of the hook should enter. Use a No. 15 hook, which a grain of barley will just cover. This bait is very successful, and is much used in the autumn and winter months for roach. It has, moreover, the recommendation of cleanliness, and being ever at hand and readily prepared. A little salt should be mixed with it, if required to be kept for any length of time.

Mr. Francis Francis, in the *Field*, commenting on the above says: "Pearl barley stands in the place of paste when you can no longer obtain gentles, towards the winter, and is held in almost equal estimation with paste by the fish, having this advantage over paste, that you do not strike the bait off at every stroke or so, and it cannot well be sucked off."

**Grub of Cockchafer.**—"I shall next," says Walton, "tell you a *winter bait* for a roach, a dace, or chub; and it is choicely good. About Allhallowtide—and so till frost comes—when you see men ploughing up heath ground, or sandy ground, or greenswards, then follow the plough, and you shall find a white worm as big as two maggots, and it hath a red head. You may observe in what ground most are, for there the crows will be most watchful, and follow the plough very close. It is all soft, and full of whitish guts. A worm that is in Norfolk and some other counties, called a grub, and is bred of the spawn or eggs of a beetle, which she leaves in holes that she digs in the ground, under cow or horse-dung, and there rests all winter, and in March and April comes to be first a red and then a black beetle. Gather a thousand or two of these, and put

them, with a peck or two of their own earth, into some tub or firkin, and cover and keep them so warm that the frost, or cold air, or winds kill them not. These you may keep all winter, and kill fish with them at any time: and if you put some of them into a little earth and honey, a day before you use them, you will find them an excellent bait for bream, carp, or indeed for almost any fish."

**Periwinkles.**—These form a little known, but excellent bait for large roach, particularly in tidal waters. They are used with a single swan shot resting on the bottom, on a hook about No. 6 or 7.

**Mussels.**—Large quantities of roach have been taken in ponds by the use of small portions of the fresh-water mussel. We have never tried the ordinary mussel, but have little doubt it would succeed where other baits of similar character are found to answer.

**Shrimps.**—Roach will, in some waters, take greedily a piece of shrimp, either raw or boiled, but there is so much uncertainty about this and other (may we call them) fancy baits, that we can only recommend the angler to try the effect of them, as against paste or gentles, whenever he may have the opportunity, as many of our best baits have been discovered accidentally.

**Lobworms.**—This bait is used with great success in the Trent and some other rivers during the summer and autumn, but is of no use at those seasons either in the Thames or Lea. No one would think of using it in these rivers, although excellent in the first named. When angling for barbel with worm, a few good roach are occasionally taken, but it is quite a chance. Mr. Bailey has devoted much attention to this matter, and attributes it to the Thames and Lea having a lower summer temperature than the Trent. He says: "The roach will take the worm in these rivers, from November to April; after that time I should recommend the angler to use other baits, such as gentles or paste. At the time Thames anglers begin to use the latter baits, we should commence fishing with the worm in the Trent. The reason is, our river in the summer months is comparatively speaking warm, while the Thames during those months is chilly and cold." Although the following method may be more adapted to trout and perch, we have known instances in which the water being coloured, many large roach have been secured.

"In throwing the line with the worm, take care not to splash the water, but let the bait fall gently on the surface, and sink slowly in the water to the required depth. After sinking, the rod and line should be very slowly moved in a direction against the stream, or in some other way, to give motion to the bait, which the fish perceiving to glide through the water, will hasten to seize upon.

"Occasionally the angler will *feel* a nibble, but he must not be in a hurry to strike, that is, to draw the fish from the water. Perhaps it is no more than a nibble, and it is well to allow the fish time to get the hook in his mouth. If drawn too quickly, you may actually pull away the hook after it is half gulped. Experience and dexterity are required in this ticklish part of the craft. As a general rule, do not strike till the line has been distinctly tugged, then strike by a slow side motion at first, then a more quick jerk, so as to cause the hook to catch in the jaws of the fish. Supposing the fish to be hooked, do not draw it violently out of the water as if in a transport of delight, but wind up part of your loose line if necessary, and holding up your rod, retire gradually backwards, by which the fish may be landed on the shore. A good fisher does not lay aside his rod to take a fish from the hook, unless it be of great size, requiring two hands; if small, hold the rod in the right hand, while you catch the fish with the left; unhook it carefully, place it in the basket, put on a new bait, and once more proceed to your sport."—*Chambers*.

**Red Worms.**—Roach will frequently take red worms, the tail more particularly, when they will not touch paste or gentles. A most successful roach fisher of our acquaintance—Mr. Johnson, of Egham—never fished for roach with any other bait.

**Gentles.**—The gentle is, next to paste, the most universal of all baits for roach. It is indeed considered by many the very best during the more genial seasons of the year.

Some of our best roach anglers maintain that a single gentle on a small hook is better than two or three on a larger hook.

As we prefer the older writers upon those subjects dilated upon, we quote Walton's instructions for the keeping of gentles. "And after this manner you may also keep gentles all winter, which are a good bait then, and

much the better for being lively and tough. Or, you may breed and keep gentles thus : Take a piece of beasts liver, and, with a cross stick, hang it in some corner over a pot or barrel half full of dry clay, and as the gentles grow big they will fall into the barrel."

Salter directs : " After gentles are of a full size, put them in a vessel with some house-sand. Some use bran, but from its heating quality, the gentles sooner turn, as anglers term it—that is, become chrysalids, in which state they are of little or no use."

M. M. says : " Fish gentles are double the size of those from other sources. A supply should always be provided in the autumn, for winter use. The best plan to pursue is to obtain a quantity of roach, or other coarse fish, as late in the year as is possible ; let them be well fly-blown. They should then be buried in a good-sized tub of moist sand or earth, and if placed in a cool cellar will remain in perfection up till February or March. It is even possible to renovate the stock in the winter, by placing a few of the chrysalids in a warm kitchen, under a bell-glass in sand, and supplying them with a piece of meat or fish as soon as they turn to flies."

**Chrysalis** (a gentle that has been kept in bran until it has turned red).—" It is strongly recommended for roach, especially in the early part of the season ; is called by the French '*l'épine-vinette*,' and is highly prized by them. We have tried it frequently, and certainly must admit it to be a successful bait ; but it is an extremely difficult job to keep it on the hook, and after all it is not comparable to the yellow cow-dung fly."—*Blakey*.

Henry Wild, the fisherman at Nottingham, recommends a chrysalis threaded on the shank of the hook, and then a white live gentle on the point. " I can assure you," he writes, " it is a killing mode."

**Tripe**.—When gentles were scarce, we have known this bait used with good effect.

**Pork Skin**.—This is a favourite bait at sea, and has in some cases proved very successful with roach, but it requires a more extended trial. We have a good opinion of it.

**Ox-palate**.—On one occasion, being short of gentles, we cut off some of the papillæ from an ox-palate, and killed a large quantity of fish with them. They answer admirably

to tip flies with, and we intend to experiment further in this direction.

**Caddis Bait.**—These insects—more particularly in May, June, and July, when they are preparing to quit their cases and assume the fly shape—are excellent baits, not only for roach, but chub and dace. The angler should on no account neglect them when attainable at this time of year, as they form then, especially, the natural food of the fish, and are taken in preference to all other baits. They are easily procurable by the aid of an osier twig, in the top of which a slit should be made, and thus one at a time these cads may be picked out from the shallows, or a boy for a trifle will off with his shoes and stockings, and procure the angler enough for his day's pursuits.

**Wasp Grub.**—When fishing in the Trent we have used this bait, which most fish have a passion for. Unfortunately it is very tender, and to remedy this defect it is sometimes boiled in milk, sometimes slightly baked, but any treatment of this sort, although it undoubtedly toughens the bait, at the same time takes away its most attractive properties. They are taken from the cakes of paper comb found in wasps' nests, and in most country places may be purchased for a few pence from the boys who amuse themselves by taking the nests.

**The Meal Worm.**, found in flour-tubs, the chinks and crannies of mills, is another most acceptable bait, being rarely refused by the largest roach. Meal worms are easily preserved throughout the year, and their keep, unlike those of the gentle, causes an enormous increase in their numbers by propagation. Two or three dozen should be first procured from the mill, or they may be purchased at the bird-fanciers, by whom they are kept and sold for the rearing of nightingales. These meal-worms should be placed in a large earthenware jar, three parts full of oat-meal, with a few pieces of flannel or soft sacking, and a piece of gauze tied over the mouth, to admit of air and prevent their escape. In this they will breed, successively changing into maggot, chrysalis, and then into moth, when they pair like other moths, lay a great number of eggs in the flannel, and then die. The eggs then become maggots, and thus continue the circle of reproduction, increasing some hundred fold in a single year. Their food should be occasionally refreshed with a handful or so of meal,

and their numbers thinned out into other jars. You can never have too many of them, for there are few of our little enjoyments so satisfactory as that which arises from the pleasure of making a present of a box or so of choice bait to a brother angler.

**Willow Maggot.**—Mr. Owen, of the Great Western Railway Company, informed us that the very best place to find roach in the autumn was in the quiet pools, upon the surface of which the fallen willow leaves were floating, and that under these he invariably caught his finest roach and chub. Mr. Wicks likewise makes mention of this fact, and very properly ascribes the presence of the fish to the attractions caused by the white grubs, which fall from the blisters or galls of these leaves while they are rotting. In this case the angler should pick out some of these white maggots from the leaves remaining on the tree, or lying on the banks, and his success is next to a certainty, as this is a favourite food of the fish at this period of the year. Nothing can be more important than the lessons these experiences teach us. The first consideration of the angler should be to ascertain what is the food of the day. Without this knowledge his takes may be either nil or scanty—with it, full and ample. No more idle prejudice exists than that which obtains amongst many anglers, to the effect that because a bait is scarce it will be preferred by the fish. The very contrary to this is the fact, and it may be often noticed, that while the fish will break up and greedily devour the ground bait, they will not touch worm or gentle. Then why persevere, and lose time with worm and gentle, when the fish tell you so plainly that the bread and bran are their chosen viands for the day, and therefore paste is the appropriate bait.

**Fresh-water Shrimp.**—In paper-mill streams, where the esparto grass is used, and its fertilizing washings enter the waters—the roach having been of late years particularly nice in their feeding—we directed Josiah Heath, the keeper of the Wraysbury water, and the watchers of other streams similarly situated, to make the most careful examination of the contents of the stomachs of the fish, and their conclusions, without any knowledge of each other's operations, are singularly alike.

Josiah Heath writes: "I think, sir, I have at length discovered the cause you have been so long in search of,



why the roach have not fed on gentles, or any of the baits commonly used for them. Have you at any time noticed what is called the fresh-water shrimp? They swarm on the bottom of this, and all the streams near here, and move with a kind of snatching motion, and are of a slate-colour. The roach feed greedily on them, as do dace, chub, and eels. The other day I picked up a large roach, half killed by a pike, and I made what a surgeon would call a post-mortem examination of it. In this I found forty-three of these shrimps, and several others partly digested. I took yesterday, as near as I can judge, a quarter of a pint out of a large eel. Do you think these shrimps will do to bait with? I certainly believe, sir, if they could be imitated artificially, they would do well to whip for dace." These shrimps have been tried with great success. They are readily caught in dozens with a small gauze landing-net.

**Silk-weed, or Flannel-weed.**—"This is *conferva rivularis*, or crow silk."—*Field*, Vol. IV. p. 127. The food upon which roach, more particularly, get so fat in streams contaminated with sewage, while resisting every offer of the angler, however tempting, has long been a problem which the more scientific ichthyologists have deemed worth the trouble of solution; nor have they been idle in their attempts to set the matter at rest, for we have seen many observations upon this head, some of which are most suggestive. They are all, however, more or less wide of the mark, as later facts do not bear out the conclusions arrived at. The following will therefore be accepted with the same degree of caution, although I may say that its results are those of no less than 210 roach opened, and examined immediately they had been taken out of the several waters impregnated with sewage; they were almost all full to repletion of weed, and the several infusoria and animalculæ bred by, and only by, sewage.

Several angling friends having taken the hint to try the silk-weed (it is a good lure for mullet in rivers), which is found adhering to stones and old wooden piles, have from time to time written to inform us of their success with this aquatic product as a bait, more particularly for roach. One of these gentlemen at Exeter says he has found it beat all other baits, with the exception of the small fresh-water shrimp, or "skipjack," which you have

mentioned as an attractive tit-bit. The weed is, however, all-powerful at times with roach, the shrimp with perch, chub, and grayling." Another angler at Rickmansworth says, "I am much indebted for this dodge—the weed,—I am taking much the heaviest baskets of any about here out of the Colne. I have no difficulty in getting abundance of it. I have but to use the two thickest joints of my rod, and fish it up from many places. I shake it about in the water a good deal first to wash it, and it is surprising how green and attractive this fish salad looks, after being cleansed of the foul messes that accumulate about this neighbourhood. My method of using it is to take a slip of the fibre, as I might take that of floss silk, and wrap it in, on and over the hook and its shank, until point and all are covered, in the shape of an inverted pear. The larger (comparatively) the bait the bigger the fish." Mr. C. S. Norcott writes from the Norfolk rivers: "I have tried the weed you mention, but do not find that it possesses *more* attractions than do gentles. It is taken by roach at about the same rate of choice. If I might hazard a suggestion, the weed may be found more taking in swift streams than in quiet, or slow-moving waters. The fish, I opine, when on the hunt after this weed, have some little difficulty to detach it from its natural seat; and if they see a piece which has apparently escaped, and is floating off, they are the more eager to avail themselves of what will cost them no little trouble." Mr. W. J. Woods writes: "I fished on July 26th at Egham, on the Thames, in the deepest part of the weir pool, but as much as possible on the Middlesex side, and out of the boiling water; with a very heavy Thames float, the shots of which went down straight, and at once; and I took a smartish lot of handsome roach with this weed, put upon the hook in the manner you were good enough to tell me. Seven of these roach were fully a pound, and four of them more than one pound and a half, and thirteen over half a pound each. The catch was seen by the people residing close by, and more than a dozen anglers and others. The fishermen say they don't believe it, although one of them handled my fish! He said they were taken with paste ledgering. This weed notion, if it is not a mere fluke, is certainly an out-and-out way of taking roach at times; but is it not, like everything else, uncertain? I tell my

mates we cannot have too many sorts of baits, and you have given us a good one in this."

**Parasites.**—Henry Crystall, while fishing for roach, accidentally impaled one of those leech-like parasites which attach themselves to the skin of the pike, and fishing with this, which he found both tough and durable, he killed three roach of an average size, before the bait was exhausted. This fact would seem to corroborate the statement that roach have been seen to remove these pests from other fish. A paste made of the flesh of the salt-water shrimp, boiled without salt, and pounded in a mortar to a tough consistence, is used by a friend of mine in the Dorset rivers, as far as the tides affect those streams, but above the tidal influence this paste appears to lose its virtue. Pieces of boiled shrimps of the size of a pea are employed in the Norfolk rivers with success.

**Flies.**—As the season advances, roach that would only look in the early spring at gentles or the small red-worm, become less fastidious, and approach nearer the surface until July and August, when they rush boldly at a fly, and afford some lively sport. "In August," says Blakey, "if the hooks on which are rigged the artificial house-fly, be tipped with live gentles, the roach will dash at them like mad."

"In the months of June and July," says the same author, "we have seen some very large roach caught in the waters of the Pas-de-Calais, with the common yellow fly, which is to be found in abundance on fresh dropped cow-dung. These are easily caught, and may be conveniently carried in a small dry phial-bottle. For this sport the angler used a beautiful light cane rod, twenty-two feet in length, with running tackle of the finest description. He allowed about two yards of the gut bottom to hang from the end of this rod; and on a very small hook, say No. 12, he put one of these yellow flies; then carefully concealing himself, so as to see without being seen, a trick wonderfully facilitated by the length of his rod,—he dabbled the bait lightly on the surface of the water. It was curious to see the large roach, from a pound and a half to two pounds in weight, come up out of the deep, and cautiously sail round the fly, as if sensible that danger was lurking near. The temptation generally proved irresistible; and a splash like that of a dog

thrown into the water announced that my friend had entrapped his wary victim."

**The Grasshopper.**—"In the autumn he practises this plan most successfully with a grasshopper, never failing to pull out some dozens of large fish in the course of the season. In short, if he ever saw amongst the weeds, or in the open water, any signs of the presence of a large roach, he felt sure of getting him by this all but infallible method."—*Blakey.*

**Blue-bottle.**—"We must not omit this fly, which may be easily obtained in large quantities from the common gentle, by putting the latter in a box or jar, with plenty of room and air, and covered with cloth or muslin. It is an excellent bait either at the surface or under water. It should be hooked between the wings, on a very small hook, about No. 12.

**Artificial Fly.**—"It was in October, at Wye, near Ashford, we observed on the shallows below the hole where we were fishing, several fish rise, and as we never make a fishing expedition without our dace rod and fly-book, we determined to see what the fly would do. We knelt down on the grass about ten feet from the bank, knowing the shyness of the roach, and for an hour and a half had as pretty sport as a reasonable man could wish, landing twenty-three roach, all, with the exception of one, above the Thames limit of eight inches. We fished with the black gnat as stretcher, and red ant as bob, both tipped with wash leather, but all the fish were taken with the red ant. The time twelve to half-past one; wind south-east; sky rather cloudy, with a bright sun at intervals. We never fished before for roach with the fly."

To this the editor of the *Field*, in a note, says, "As a rule, roach do not rise well to the fly, their food being chiefly at the bottom; but sometimes they do take the fly, and many are caught at times, even on the Thames, by the fly-fisher for dace. Our correspondent's experience, however, curiously confirms our own, for the only time when we ever remember to have seen the roach rising greedily at the fly, was once when the surface of the water was thickly beset with the ant-fly, at Hampton, and on that afternoon the roach were feeding voraciously on it. Whether they have any special taste for formic acid or no would be a speculative inquiry; but if so, all

the old tales told by former writers of the power of essences may not be altogether fabulous."

Roach are taken in large quantities by whipping with the fly while on the shallows, to which they resort to scour themselves after spawning. In this way, a writer remarks, "I have seen four fish on the line at once, a fish at each hook, as they rise with great avidity, but there is little play in them at this time, and they are drawn to bank as often on their backs as on their stomachs."

They should not be taken or fished for at this time, as they afford little sport and are quite worthless as food, we merely mention this to show that at times roach will take a fly greedily.

**Natural Ant Fly.**—Walton tells us to "Take the blackish ant fly out of the mole-hill or ant-hill, in which place you shall find them in the month of June; or, if that be too early in the year, then doubtless you may find them in July, August, and most of September. Gather them alive, with both their wings, and then put them into a glass that will hold a quart or pottle; but first put into the glass a handful, or more, of the moist earth out of which you gather them, and as much of the roots of the grass of the said hillock; and then put in the flies gently, that they lose not their wings, lay a clod of earth over it, and then so many as are put into the glass without bruising will live there a month or more, and be always in readiness for you to fish with. But if you would have them keep longer, then get any great earthen pot, or barrel of three or four gallons, which is better; then wash your barrel with water and honey, and having put into it a quantity of earth and grass roots, then put in your flies, and cover it, and they will live a quarter of a year. These in any stream and clear water are a deadly bait for roach or dace, or for a chub: and your rule is to fish not less than a handful from the bottom."

**Baiting.**—At the risk of repetition we will make a few remarks on the subject of baiting.

**Lobworm.**—A small one should be selected, bright, clear, and lively, with a flat tail; after selection it should be rolled in dry sand or dust, which absorbs the slime, and renders it easy to hold, and then the point of a No. 5 hook passed through from the head to within a quarter of an inch of the tail. Sometimes the tail only is used.

**Red Worms** are baited in the same manner on a hook about No. 8 or 9.

**Paste.**—There is a great difference of opinion as to the proper size of paste baits, but much must always depend on the size of the fish and the nature of the water. On the Thames it would be folly to use a piece larger than a pea, whereas in the Norfolk rivers a piece equal to four or five times that size would not be too much. The hook, a short shank one, 9 to 11, ought to be well covered; but if a large bait be used it is better to employ a small triangle, which holds the paste better, and is much more certain in its operation.

**Gentles.**—Here again doctors differ, and there are several methods of using this valuable bait. Anglers are recommended to employ them well scoured; now all our experience goes to prove that the newer and more offensive they are—to our olfactories—the more fish prize them. Therefore we say advisedly, always use unscoured gentles for choice. Many use a No. 8 or 9 hook, on which they thread three or four gentles, putting the point of the hook in about a quarter of an inch from the thick end, and bringing it out there, except the last, with which the point is covered. When roach are large and ravenous, this plan will take them very well, but if shy they only nibble the extremities of the gentles, without touching the hook. Another plan is to thread one gentle, so as to make it cover the shank of the hook, and then fix another on the point, the hook being 10 or 11. One good and successful fisherman we know squeezes the gentle on the shank so as only to leave the skin. Our favourite plan is to use only one gentle of the largest size; through the thick end of this, just under the skin, we pass a very sharp hook, about No. 13 or 14, with a short shank. The hook being so small is not noticed; the bait is almost uninjured, and nothing impedes the passage of the hook into the tough skin of the roach.

**Wasp-grub.**—This bait is extremely tender, and we know of no better plan of using it than the last mentioned, with a hook about No. 12.

**Fresh-water Shrimp,** if alive, should be hooked through the tail, the point coming out at the upper side.

**Tripe and Pork-skin** should be cut into thin strips;

these and the chrysalis, caddis-worm, and meal-worm, may be all used as the single gentle.

**Natural Flies** may be hooked transversely through the shoulders, or by entering the point between the wings and bringing it out through the back; in either method a small hook, made of fine wire, should be employed.

An anonymous writer says, "Don't pierce the gentle at all, but insert the hook as finely as possible in a portion, and at the edge, of the blunt and tough end of the gentle; this done, put on another in the same way, until you have three, four, five, six, or even more, according to the size of the hook. The hook thus baited has somewhat the appearance of a ring with a few short keys upon it, and the effect will be that the gentles, instead of being killed and mangled, enter the water full of life, and move about like the snakes upon the head of Medusa."

## CHAPTER VI.

## FISHING IN THE LEA.

ROD—FLOATS—METHOD OF FISHING—GROUND BAIT—OLD CORBETT  
 —COLONEL WILLIAMSON'S GROUND BAIT—STRIKING—PLAYING—  
 LANDING NET—POSTURE OF ANGLER—FISHING IN THE TRENT—  
 FISHING IN THE YARE—POND FISHING—TIDAL WATERS—  
 FRESHERS.

**The Rod.**—"The rod for the purpose of Lea roach fishing should be made expressly, and kept exclusively for this sport. The material should be cane, or very light bamboo, it should not be more than fourteen feet long, the whole not weighing many ounces. It should be when in use as but one piece, and so constructed that it shall be very stiff, and yet very pliable. The superiority of such a rod will be seen in many respects. First, it will be very light in the hand, and with it you will be able to strike your fish with the greatest quickness and precision. Secondly, when you strike, it will not break your hair line, as a heavy one would be likely to do; and thirdly, when you have hooked your fish, it will so give to its pulling that your line will not break, though it should be a roach of the greatest weight they run."—*The Rev. Jas. Martin*, in his time the king of river Lea anglers.

**Lea Fishing.**—The following instructions from "*Martin's Angler's Guide*," (1854), in reference to Lea roach fishing, are so good, and agree so thoroughly with our own notions and experience, that we cannot do better than transcribe them.

"Suppose that you have the proper tackle, and have made the ground bait, you go to the place where you intend to fish. Don't stand over and look into it, to see if you can perceive any fish, neither let any other person do so, if you can help it; for very often, by acting thus im-



prudently—especially if the bank be high and the water clear—you will drive all the roach out of the swim, and it may be a considerable time before you entice them back again. Having pitched upon your place, go to it cautiously and quietly, and immediately take your seat, and if the ground be damp take care to have a piece of cork or board to sit on. Being seated, put your rod together, beginning with the top joints; then loop on your line, hook on your plummet, and try the depth, and be sure you do it as gently as possible. Your line must be just so long as to allow about fifteen inches between the rod and the float. If, therefore, you find it too long, you must shorten it, if too short, lengthen it, and in no case fish with it in any other form and think it will do, because it will not. Having your line the precise length, and your float in the exact place, keep your plummet on, and let your line soak in the water, while you make your bait as before directed; this is a good plan, because a hair line unsoaked is very tender. Your bait being well made, take off your plummet, bait your hook, and cast in, taking particular notice which way your float rides in the water, and then throw in your ground bait according to your best judgment. Some will throw a lot of ground bait in first, and then, when they begin to fish, find that they cannot keep the float for a second in the place where it is. Let all your movements be gentle, neat, and clever; bearing in mind that making no disturbance in or about the water, and the use of very fine tackle, are most essential. In fact, neatness is everything in fishing, especially for roach. The bait employed must be a gentle, and the tackle almost of an imperceptible nature, and then you will catch them, but not under other circumstances. A clumsy angler, with a heavy rod, a coarse line and hook, a large float, a good parcel of large shots, and a bait nearly as large as the top of your finger, will drive all the roach away from him, just as a large dog drives a flock of sheep, notwithstanding the very great desire he may have to catch some of them. If the fish are on the feed, and your tackle is rightly adjusted, you will have a bite very soon after you begin to fish. Strike the moment you see the float affected, letting the movement be made with the hand only, from the wrist, not from the arm, and turning the point of your rod upwards. Don't wait until you

think the fish has swallowed the bait, because as soon as he finds it is attached to something he will blow it out of his mouth, unless he be very hungry, which is not often the case; and remembering that your float cannot be affected by him unless he has your bait between his lips. Do not forget, also, that the largest fish generally bite in the most cautious manner. As soon as you have hooked a fish, little or big, keep a tight line on him, your rod being raised directly over him. If he be large and pull well, don't be afraid of him, for if you keep your rod over him he must pull tremendously to break you, though your tackle be of such a delicate order. Your hair, when well soaked, is elastic, and your rod is very pliable, and if your judgment be good all his endeavours to get away will be unavailing. The grand thing, especially in a young angler, is not to be in too great a hurry. Hundreds of good fish have been lost for want of a little time and patience. Keep your rod over him until he is quite still, and if you do not use a landing net, lift him out of the water as gently as you possibly can, with the rod in your right hand, letting him hang his whole weight. Then very cautiously swing him to your left hand, and as cautiously get him within your grasp, and hold him so fast that he shall not stir, while you take the hook out of his mouth. All this care is really necessary, for if you pull out quickly a fish of only four or five ounces, and let him flounder about in your lap, or on the ground, it is ten to one that your hair gets broken long before you get the hook out. We have seen it done many many times. If your fish is above four or five ounces, it is always best to use your landing net. Never at any time attempt to lay hold of a fish when it is in the water, neither suffer any other person to do so for you; for in that case you will be pretty sure to lose your fish, and have your line broken into the bargain.

“Always keep your seat while you are killing and landing your fish, unless it be upon any critical occasion, for rising up suddenly, and moving about your swim, if the water be clear, will drive all the fish clean out of it, and you may have to wait no little time before they come back again.”

One of our reminiscences of the Lea somewhat differs from the above injunctions of a close adhesion to one seat,

not that we in any way advocate other than the keeping to one place, provided the roach continue on the feed, nor do we agree with the old veteran that the swim was disturbed at each capture, provided he did nothing contrary to the injunctions but now so ably set forth. The best ground bait, when roach fishing in the Lea, is bread and bran. Take about a pound of bread of any kind, and soak it in water until it is quite soft, then put it into a bag and squeeze all the water from it, after which mix in the bag with it about a quart of bran, and work it together till it becomes a stiff paste. This you may do at home if you please, and take it all ready with you to the water. When baiting the ground with it throw a piece in now and then about the size of a walnut. If the water be deep, press each piece into the form of a cup, and put into it a small stone, closing it up, so that it may sink quickly into the place where you wish it to fall; always bearing in mind that ground bait, falling into an improper place, is very detrimental to your sport, seeing that it coaxes the fish away from you. Many anglers are not half particular enough in this respect. Your baited hook should always be exactly in the place where the ground bait is. If the water is still and shallow, the smaller your pieces are the better. If the fish are feeding well do not throw in any bait, but, as you would do in more important circumstances, "leave well alone." We have sometimes found that in still waters, a little bread chewed very fine and thrown in, is a very enticing ground bait.

Old Corbett, a Peninsular veteran, used to bring heavy baskets of roach from the Lea, and finding him upon one occasion at Ware, in Hertfordshire, we watched him closely from a respectful distance. He was seated upon a cane box, made by himself, to hold his tackle in the one half, and his fish were dropped through a slit in the other, without his having to quit his seat. This box he moved from swim to swim. "Why," we inquired, "do you shift your swim? You have just taken a good sized roach at the last, and yet you leave it." "Yes, your honour, I have five pitches here within thirty yards, and I always make it a rule to move to another swim after taking a fish." As this was somewhat new to us we asked his reason. "Why you see, your honour, I have ground baited each of these five swims, and I have found by ex-

perience that the noise and tussle made in landing a fish at one place, drives the lot off, and they go to the others, where, if I throw a little fresh ground bait in, I get them about me again." Upon this the veteran cast in a lump of ground bait, not bigger than a hazel nut, and had scarcely got his hook down, when he struck and shortly landed another plumper. There was something, we thought, odd about this ground bait; we therefore picked up a small piece he had let fall, and asked him bluntly what it was composed of; he frankly told us it was nothing but oatmeal—that pollard would do—browned over the fire in a frying-pan, and then mixed into a paste with treacle or molasses. He had learned this from his colonel (Williamson), a very expert and successful roach fisher, and he found it the most attractive ground bait he had ever used. "Lord bless you," said he, after accepting an ounce of birdseye, "I could tell you lots o' them dodges I learned from Colonel Williamson. I used to go a fishing with him wherever we were quartered." And he did, certainly, tell us one or two somewhat marvellous things, which we must test before we retail them; but as they in no way concern our especial subject they can easily be dispensed with here.

Salter says, "By some writers the roach is considered a silly fish, and easily to be taken; but it requires much skill and practice, with a quick eye, fine tackle, and a steady hand, before any one can pretend to the character of a good roach angler. I will admit, that in ponds, where they are half starved, roach are easily taken, and that the small ones in rivers are frequently caught with almost any kind of tackle or baits; but pond roach fishing affords little sport to the true and generally informed angler, and little more does taking those small ones on the shallows in rivers; but the taking thirty pounds weight or more of roach, from six or eight ounces to a pound or upwards each fish, out of a stream from six to ten feet deep, with a very light rod, single hair line, and No. 10 or 11 hook, in a day's angling (which is frequently done by the London anglers), affords as much amusement to some as any other mode of fishing: indeed, I am acquainted with many anglers who seldom wet a line but for roach, preferring it to every other kind of fishing."

**Striking.**—"When you see the least movement of the

float, either by its being pulled down, or thrown a little up, strike quickly but lightly (the motion coming from your wrist, not from the arm), for if the jerk is too violent you will break the line, which need not be hazarded, as the least jerk hooks those tender-mouthed fish."—*Ibid.*

**Playing.**—"If you have hit or hooked a fish, raise the top of your rod, keeping him as much under the top as you can, and the butt downwards, nearly touching the ground, and by thus playing him under the point of your rod, he will soon be your own."—*Ibid.*

**Landing Net.**—"In this fine fishing, it is best to take with you a landing net, particularly if you fish off a high bank, or wharfing, or punt, or you will hazard breaking the line or hook in weighing the fish out."—*Ibid.*

**Posture of Angler.**—Nearly all authors tell us, "In angling for roach a sitting posture is to be preferred, as, by that means, you are more out of their sight: always keep the top of your rod up over the float, and so high that none of the line above the float lies on or touches the water." It is herein the Nottingham style possesses, in bright waters, one of its many advantages over the Lea fashion; the rod is afar off, and does not continually serve to affright the fish with either its substance or its shadow.

**Shooting the Line.**—Bailey says: "The method of angling for roach, as practised on the Thames and Lea, is quite the reverse of the Nottingham style, and the tackle used is altogether different, I mean when paste, gentles, or any other light bait is fished with. Some of the London roach fishers are very clever in this branch of the art. But during my rambles by both rivers I observed many of this class of anglers using tackle which I considered not at all suitable for the delicate and pretty art of roach fishing. The angler who can apply the greatest amount of deception, and fish with the lightest tackle, is the most likely to meet with success, and I think the generality of my readers will agree with me on this point. However, when I see a man fishing with a cork float, with perhaps a hundred small shots upon the gut bottom, as close together as they could be placed, and fishing a still water, not more than four feet deep, with weight enough to fish a barbel swim, I think him a century behind in

roach fishing; and that unless he uses lighter and finer tackle, he must expect often to return with an empty basket. Most of the London anglers use a great number of shot on their gut bottoms, and very close together. I know this would not suit me, or my style of fishing. Suppose you are fishing for roach in a gentle swim, with the gut bottom weighted as I have described, the shot being put close together to within six or seven inches of the hook. You throw in your line, the bait is at once sent down to the bottom, and kept there. From your float to the hook your line is as straight as a stick, and your bait is so held down by the shot, that it cannot present any attraction to the fish. It cannot move about so as to imitate your ground bait swimming down the stream. Your bait has lost its freedom, and is not allowed to swim in that tempting form which would at once induce a fish to take it. I do not like the system of leaving the fish to find the bait, but, on the contrary, I prefer sending the bait to find the fish, which is, in my opinion, the only proper way of angling in a stream. The bottom shot on my tackle is at least ten inches from the hook; the next one three inches above it. Between this and the one above I allow about two inches and a half, and so on to the top of a yard tackle, tapering the shot up the gut, so that they shall be thickest at the top. It will now be observed that part of your gut bottom nearest the hook is considerably the lightest, consequently, when the float is swimming down the stream, by putting a little pressure on the float, the under-current near the bottom acts on the light part of the tackle, and at once brings the bait first. Let it swim gently in this form, and if the fish won't bite, the bait will run against their noses."

**Fishing in the Yare.**—The following extract from the *Field* of 14th November, 1863, gives a good account of one of the Norfolk rivers:—

"Three days' roach fishing on the Yare (at Buckenham). —The following morning we rose at seven; cloudy with a strong wind, rather too much of it, but from the right quarter. This was my first visit to this part of the country, and the first thing I missed was a boatman. The ferry-boy offered his services to move the boat, and whilst we were putting the rods together, he came alongside, and with a grave countenance, demanded, 'Do

yo want ony doomps, sar?' My cockney simplicity asked a little further explanation, not thinking the lad alluded to ground bait, of which we told him to mix a dozen large balls. Another important thing to be remembered is bait, not a gentle or brandling to be had here. Fortunately I had a scant supply in my basket from London, quite an after-thought, for it was the quality of the bait caused me to bring it, little thinking there was none at all at Buckenham. Well, at ten o'clock, we were fairly at work, about fifty yards from the ferry. The boat being sideways, or on a line with the bank, the rod at the bow had the longest swim. The plumb showed a fair level bottom, with all twelve feet of water. In with some 'doomps,' and our day's sport began. The first swim was a roach each, and a rattling day's take we had. At two the boy fetched us to dinner, and in an hour or so we were back again, winding up at six for tea. We had a bushel basket each to keep our fish in, and a trifling wager caused us to take stock on the lawn; result—Mr. Dodge, 112 roach; myself, 136. Their weight we had no opportunity of ascertaining, but it must have been considerable; pound roach were not scarce, and half-pounders common; not a dace in either basket. One or two trifling drawbacks limited the day's sport, good as it was. Our lines were not heavy enough for the swim. I wanted a much larger float, with twice the number of shot; a third of the swim was gone before the line fairly settled. Another thing to be mentioned is the fatigue of a day's fishing in such deep water; we were fairly tired out with working something like 15 feet of line all day. However, we had had a first-rate day's roach-fishing, and after tea we decided on trying tomorrow a shallower part of the river.

"The following morning opened with bright sunshine and a cloudless sky; wind still very high. We moored about a hundred yards towards Yarmouth, found a nice level swim of eight feet, threw in some 'doomps,' and began. The sun was a little too bright towards mid-day, and the sport hardly up to yesterday, but still enough to make many a Thames angler's mouth water. Our stock of gentles, too, was nearly exhausted. Mr. Dodge made up some paste, which exhausted his stock of patience; not being thoroughly manipulated, and without lint to toughen it, every strike, of course, cleared the hook. We did not

count out to-day, and one basket held the fish—as fine a lot of roach as I ever saw. Some anglers from Norwich were working at our old pitch, but did very indifferently. I fancy their tackle, from the little I saw of it, was hardly fine enough; their hooks full large. For about an hour in the day, whilst the tide is nearly stationary, the fish suddenly leave off feeding. It matters little which way the tide works, up or down they bite equally well. Friday dawned with every chance of another fine day. After breakfast we fixed our poles, got into a capital level swim again, and began. The last of the gentles had vanished yesterday, but the brandlings were nice and lively, and not begun on. Poor Dodge, amateur like, had a horror of impaling worms, added to which the yellow matter exuding on the hook passing through, thoroughly disgusted his olfactory organ, so he worked up some more paste, grumbled, and caught roach as fast as ever. My brandlings brought another kind of sport—the bream came on; not large, seldom over a pound, or under half of one, but about six dozen of them were in my basket before dinner. Our third day's sport was, perhaps, as far as weight went, the best of the three: bream and roach bit every swim, bar the hour of tide turning, and dusk came on much sooner than we thought it due. Reluctantly we packed up and pulled back to the inn."—*W. H. F.*

**Pond Fishing.**—The rod for pond fishing, unless there are carp, should be light cane, of such a length as the angler could comfortably use. A float formed of half a small porcupine quill, with one or two small shot not nearer than twelve or fifteen inches to the hook, the upper part of the line being formed of two horsehairs twisted, and the lower of one. Running tackle may be used or not, at the discretion of the angler. But unless carp interfere with the bait, pond roach are generally to be killed with a tight line. The ground bait, a little chewed bread, or a few refuse gentles; or, if paste be used minute pellets of the dough made for the hook are generally sufficient. The precautions necessary being *extreme quiet*, and keeping out of sight of the fish. The depth of the water is not of the slightest consequence, if the conditions named can be enforced. Should the locality be good, and the weather favourable, they may be taken in any depth of water, from one foot to twenty. But in every water—and



this rule extends not only to ponds, but to rivers—there are always spots particularly affected by the fish. These spots are found either by experience, tradition, or in many instances what appears to be the unfailing sagacity of some anglers.

There is a slight variation from this fishing in the dykes of the fenny parts of Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, &c., where the fish, although somewhat under the same influences, are less nice in their habits, and more free in their feeding, than in the ponds of which we have been speaking. Still, those who want to succeed here, should take the precautions above recommended.

The baited hook in ponds should be as near as possible to the bottom, but great care must be taken not to fish over a weedy bottom, although a clear space in the immediate vicinity of weeds is the best locality that can be selected. The fish frequent the weeds for shelter, but generally feed in the open, being mostly bolder in proportion to the nearness of their retreat.

The hook should be very small, even as small as Nos. 11 to 14.

The baits generally found to answer best for roach in ponds, are paste and gentles; particularly the latter in the winter. The gentles should be fine, and only one used on the hook.

**Tidal Waters.**—When angling in tidal rivers it is essentially necessary to alter the depth at which the bait floats, according to the variation in the depth of water, and it is sometimes expedient to try farther from the bottom than usual, as fish in these waters often travel for miles up and down with the tide. The habits of the roach vary much in different rivers. We believe, as a general rule, they bite best when the tide is flowing, but this is by no means the case universally. In the tidal part of the Thames, for instance, they are caught during the ebb, and all sport ceases during the flow.

In some of the deep, slow-running Norfolk rivers, fish bite equally well during the flow and ebb. They cease to bite during slack water, whether after flood or ebb. This rule appears to be almost without exception.

In mill streams they generally bite only when the mills are going.

**Freshes.**—In navigable rivers, as the Thames, which

have their waters impounded to assist the navigation, there used to be regular days when flushes of water were let out of the pounds and locks to increase the depth of water below for heavily-laden barges. These are now scarcely necessary, as the barge business has been nearly absorbed by the railways. When these flushes, or heavy falls of rain in the up country occur, the fish lie in wait for what the disturbed state of the stream brings down. Should the current be very rapid, the best sport will be found close to the banks, and in quiet eddies.

Thaddeus Norris, in the "American Angling Book," speaking of the roach of that country, says: "Of course no angler will fish for roach when better sport can be had; but as they are only in season when all other fish refuse a bait, and thus act as a palliative to one who suffers from 'Anglo-mania,' they deserve some notice.

"On any warm day, from October to April, the angler may unite recreation with exercise, by taking his walking cane rod in his hand, and with a lump of tough dough, or a few small wood-worms, have an hour's sport with these pretty little fish. If he has some juvenile friend with him, the pleasure is enhanced. I have taken scores of them during the winter, from seven to nine inches in length, at Gray's Ferry, also in Cooper's Creek, and at Red Bank, below the city. They are generally found on the lee side of a pier stretching into a fresh water creek or river, and sometimes into the dock itself.

"When fishing for roach I have frequently laid them on the snow or ice, when they would become frozen; but on taking them home carefully, and putting them in hydrant water, would have the whole catch swimming about. There is some nicety required in taking roach artistically, which is not attained by bunglers, and this fact adds to the pleasure of this kind of winter angling."

This author appears to fish for roach as we do for smelts, as he says: "The rod should be slight, and from eight to ten feet long; the line of fine silk; bottom of fine gut; hooks, No. 12 Kirby, one of which should be seized to the extreme end, *and three others* to short pieces of gut, diverging at intervals of eight inches; float, a neat quill; the sinker should be just heavy enough to sink half or two-thirds of the float; the bottom should touch or be near the ground."

"The bait, if paste, should be rolled in small pellets, not larger than a No. 1 shot, between the finger and thumb; it should merely cover the point and barb of the hook. When they bite freely a small mite of the tough skin of a chicken's leg will obviate the necessity of baiting often. Worms obtained by peeling the bark from rotten logs, are generally used in winter. On a cold day a bite is almost imperceptible to a novice, but a little observation will soon teach him when to strike, which should be done by a slight but quick motion. Roach will not rise at a fly in winter, but I have caught them when casting for trout on a pond in March."

## CHAPTER VII.

FISHING IN SHARP WATERS, AS THE THAMES—PUNT FISHING—  
TACKLE—MR. MARRIOTT'S TACKLE—BANK FISHING—GROUND  
BAIT—NOVEL GROUND BAIT.

**Fishing in Sharp and Heavy Waters, as the Thames.**—Here the conditions are very different to those previously described. We have swims ranging from four to ten feet in depth, of a sharp, and sometimes turbulent character, which require a style of tackle and method of fishing peculiar to themselves.

This fishing will be divided into punt fishing and bank fishing.

**Punt Fishing.**—In this, as in all other angling, light tackle is a *sine qua non*, and whoever employs the best, finest, and most appropriate implements, will—all things being alike—be most successful.

The rod we prefer for this work should be light and handy, but rather more elastic than the traditional roach rods, and should spring regularly nearly down to the butt.

The running line should be of very fine silk, either twisted or plaited.

The reel must be moderately large, and free running. We prefer the Nottingham line and reel for this purpose, but they are objected to by many anglers, on account of their sometimes over running, a circumstance arising not from any initial fault of the contrivance—which is cheap, simple, and ingenious—but from the inexperience of the man attempting to use it.

The weight of a line fit for roach, dace, and any fish up to two or three pounds in weight, need not exceed two-and-a-half or three drachms per hundred yards. One fit for barbel, perch, or chub would be from six to twelve drachms. The drachm here mentioned is the avoirdupois drachm, used only in the silk trade, and of which there are sixteen to

the ounce. These lines we speak of appear to be a speciality of Nottingham, those made at other places seldom equalling them in the quality of silk or regularity of twist, great care being necessary to regulate exactly the tension of the forward and back twists, the reverse of this being the cause of kinks and snarls, particularly in very fine lines.

The bottom line usually employed is a three-yard length of gut, tapering a little towards the bottom.

The float is made of a long thin stratum of cork, covering a large porcupine quill, with a quill cap near the top, and a second, or small loop of brass wire, near the bottom. This is what is generally known by the name of the Thames float, and is well adapted for roach and barbel fishing in strong streams.

The hooks used are generally Nos. 9 to 10 in size, tied upon gut; and a sufficient quantity of large split shot are nipped on to the line a foot to fifteen inches above the hook.

The all but universal bait is the gentle, which, when well scoured, stands the wear and tear better than anything else. Paste baits are useless for float fishing, from the strong current.

The following description has been given to me by Mr. Marriott of the tackle used by him, and which has never been beaten when tried against that ordinarily used, and although it has been glanced at before, we think may be repeated here with advantage. The running line, reel, and float are similar to those mentioned, except that the float is made with a larger top than usual, cut off square, and the line runs through two very small brass loops, whipped near the upper and lower extremities of the float. To prevent the line slipping a small piece of india rubber is inserted in the running line with two half hitches, and this indian rubber must be thin and flexible enough to pass through the rings of the rod, but not through the small ring of the float on which it rests. A float fitted in this manner may be used in water much deeper than the rod. This is one of its recommendations, but others are, the great ease and comfort of the style, and the facility of striking quickly and sharply at the end of a long swim. When used in water, the depth of which does not exceed the depth of the rod, a similar stop is fixed on the line,

about three feet below the float, but when the water is much deeper, the lower stop is placed at about the rod's length from the hook. Every one knows that in the ordinary way of striking with a fixed float at the end of a swim, the oblique direction in which the float is forced to travel causes considerable resistance, and consequently great disturbance of the water; while in the travelling float we are now describing the line passes easily through the wire loops, without altering the position of the float, however sharp the strike may be. At the bottom of the running line is fixed about three feet of human hair, of about fifteen to eighteen hairs in thickness; this is sufficiently elastic to allow fish to be struck so sharply as would inevitably carry away any light tackle fitted in the ordinary manner. Below the human hair is about a yard of strong single horse hair, doubled at the lower part for a few inches, where the weights used to sink the line are placed. These are of cast lead, nearly in the shape of grains of oats. They are of two sizes, weighing respectively 14 and 28 grains. The hook length of fine cinnamon-coloured horse hair a foot long, comes of course below this, and carries one small shot about four inches above the hook.

The latter is of a very small size, about No. 13 or 14, with short shank, and neck or round bend. The bait used is a single gentle, hooked as lightly as possible through the thick end, the whole of the shank and barb being exposed. Carrion gentles may be used, and at times the fish seem to prefer their high flavour to those that have been scoured in bran or sand. The great tenderness of the unscoured gentles being no impediment to this method of baiting. The point of the hook should be kept as sharp as possible; a fine flat watchmaker's file being a very convenient implement for the purpose. With this tackle barbel of two or three pounds' weight may easily be killed in the heaviest water, as it is possible to get the hook through the tough leather of their mouths; a very difficult matter when using single hair under other circumstances.

Punt fishing is almost entirely confined to the Thames, where it is in many parts a necessity. It is either, fish from a punt, or not at all; most of the best waters being inaccessible from the banks. Many ridicule men for sitting

in a boat several hours at a time to catch a few roach, dace, or gudgeon; but it should be remembered that with every fondness for sport in its more exciting varieties, age, physical infirmity, or many other circumstances may prevent this enjoyment, leaving boat fishing the only means of following a favourite pursuit.

The professional fishermen on the Thames are a curious race. As a rule they generally know the water well in their own immediate neighbourhood, but cannot be depended on as guides away from their homes, although they will tell you they know every inch of the water for fifty miles. They are generally civil and attentive, but averse to hard work. They sometimes undertake to provide tackle and bait, but the former is invariably of an inferior description, such as no real roach fisher would tolerate, and the latter—except in two or three very frequented stations—conspicuous by its absence.

The choice of swim must be made according to the season and state of the water, and here the local knowledge of the puntsman is valuable. The punt being properly fixed, the next step is to have the swim well raked over with the gudgeon rake. This is well worth doing, as it clears the bottom, exposes various larvæ, and in most cases attracts the roach, dace, and gudgeon wonderfully. Fish are very curious, and—although shy at times—will frequently get close to the scoops of a dredging machine when in full work. We have often watched a shoal of them, with their noses near the edge of the turbid water. At such a time they bite sharp and quick, knowing that if they do not seize the prey others will.

The rod should now be put together, reel fixed, running line passed through the rings, and a bottom line and float selected suitable to the water, as before directed under the heading "floats." If the float be too light, the hook will not reach the bottom until a great part of the swim is passed over; if too heavy, it creates much disturbance, and is not sufficiently sensitive, as it must be borne in mind that these fish bite more boldly, and sharper, in proportion to the depth and turbulence of the water. A very good rule is, that the hook, if dropped into the water close to the edge of the punt, should reach the bottom by the time the float has travelled about two feet.

The depth is then taken carefully; the practice generally

being to have the distance from the hook to the top of the float exactly equal to the depth of the water. The line of gut or hair should be allowed to remain in the water for some time before fishing, to take off the brittleness inevitable with a dry line.

Some ground bait should now be gently dropped in three or four feet in front, if in shallow water; if in deeper water, close to the punt; and if in a very deep heavy stream, at the back of the punt. In the first case, if the ground bait were dropped close, the fish would be frightened to approach it; in the last, it would drift partially out of reach, and part of the swim would be lost.

The line is usually arranged about two or three feet longer than the rod, which for this fishing seldom exceeds ten feet in length; so that the swim will extend fifteen to eighteen feet from the boat, according to the depth of water. When the Nottingham tackle is used, the line is sometimes allowed to run until the float has passed over ten, twenty, or even thirty yards of water. In this manner, particularly when the latter is very bright, the largest fish are often taken.

The hook, when baited, should be dropped in close to the punt, and the float allowed to travel freely, with as little slack line above it as possible, the rod being held nearly upright at the moment the hook is dropped in, and gradually lowered as the float swims forward, until at last the rod is quite horizontal, and the float begins to drag sideways; then a sharp but not violent strike should be made, the float gently raised, and the line dropped again close to the boat. This is supposing no bite to occur during the traverse of the float; should the slightest indication be seen, the strike should be immediate, but it is always well to strike as a matter of course at the end of every swim.

The punt cannot be kept too quiet; by quiet we do not mean silence in words, but in actions. A heavy foot-fall, a blow with a rod, the movement of a chair, or any noise of this sort is instantly communicated to the water, and may be heard to an immense distance; but talking alone does not appear to disturb fish.

We have now placed the angler fairly before the enemy, and can only, in addition, wish him success.

**Bank Fishing.**—Bank anglers in the lower reaches of the



Thames meet with but little encouragement, at least in those portions of the river which are mostly fished from punts. One reason is, that in many places the banks are not favourable to angling; another, that the fish naturally go where they find most food; thus the habit of casting in ground bait regularly at certain pitches must necessarily make the chances of those who angle from the bank comparatively small. Although good bags may occasionally be made by fishing from the margin of the stream, we would advise the bank angler, if possible, to frequent those places only which are not visited by parties afloat. There are swims near locks and weirs, in which, without a boat, the angler may have as good a chance as those in the centre of the stream; and where high banks or overhanging bushes permit of the fisherman screening himself from his prey, sport of no mean order may be obtained. There is little doubt that the true sportsman would rather throw his fly from a meadow, or watch his float from behind some old willow stump, than sit confined to the limited area of a punt.

The bank fisher, if angling in clear, transparent water, should not fish with the float opposite to him, but rather sit sideways, letting his line travel beyond the point from which he would be visible to the fish.

After all, there is nothing equal to the Nottingham style of angling for bank fishing.

The system has been the result of years of experience acquired by a succession of close observers, and is still represented by such men as Bailey, Wild, &c. But the Nottingham plan can never be generally pursued on the Thames until the angler acquires the mode of using the thin silk lines, and light wooden winch, and then much of the difference in the character of the fishing in the two streams would soon disappear. That the Nottingham style of angling can be readily adapted to any running water has been shown over and over again, not only in those rivers which are open and free from weeds, but in some almost choked up with aquatic vegetation. Thus the Nottingham angler, when everybody else has deserted the water on account of such obstructions, may go down to some projecting bank or bend, and there, *fishing in the run between the heaviest banks of weeds*, take as many roach, if not more, than when the river was free from ob-

structions. These places are very favourite haunts of the fish. Let the angler sit still for awhile, and he will soon see the fishy crowd come out, one by one, into the clear water, and swim up and down these, their natural thoroughfares, in shoals sufficient to make his mouth water, for in these runs there is generally clean gravel or sand, which they delight in. At Higham Ferrers, on the Nen, some few years ago, we were told before starting to fish, that there was not room enough to get in a float. We took 32 lb. of roach and chub in five hours, merely by throwing in occasionally a little half-chewed bread, and fishing in the run of the waters, between the long weed, as far down the stream as we could manage our line with effect. There is this inconvenience, however, that the large fish, when hooked, make for the weed, and then any injudicious pulling upon the part of the angler would be fatal to the line. In this case the angler should retire from the bank in a stooping position, letting out his line as he retreats well out of sight into the meadow. He should then approach the stream some ten or twelve yards below the point where the fish ran into the weeds, and if he there puts on such a strain as the tackle will fairly bear, the fish will generally be drawn out of his retreat and landed without trouble. Whenever a heavy fish is struck under these circumstances, it should always, if practicable, be turned down stream. The worst of this proceeding is that it disturbs the water, so that it becomes only a choice of evils; but if done quietly, keeping as far as possible out of sight, the fish soon come back.

It should never be forgotten by those in pursuit of fish, that the latter—being in a much denser medium than air—can see objects on the shore that would be quite invisible to them but for the extraordinary effects of refraction. This is a well known law, which must be taken for granted here, as it would require more space than we can afford to prove it, except by one or two familiar examples. If we take a tumbler nearly filled with water, and place in it a straw or pencil in a slanting position, when we look along the latter, we shall find that it appears no longer straight, but as if bent at an angle where it touches the water.

Another experiment is to place a coin at the bottom of a wide basin or tub, then to retire gradually until the

coin is just hidden by the edge of the vessel; if another person then pours water into it, the coin will soon appear above the edge. From these instances it is apparent that fish can see persons and things on the banks, which would be quite hidden from them but for the high refractive power of water.

There are some curious facts relating to this phenomenon of refraction, and although not bearing on our subject, we will mention one instance. When the tide is low, the cows, &c., on the Isle of Dogs are invisible at Greenwich, but as the tide rises, so do these animals gradually come in sight, until at a very high tide even the grass and dikes are visible. In this case we believe the refractive power is exercised by a stratum of air, cooled by contact with the water, and so becoming much denser than the surrounding atmosphere.

The tackle and method of fishing are much like those of the Lea, except the rod, which is shorter, and always fitted with a running line. When the Nottingham reel is employed to throw out a ledger, spinning tackle, or heavy float, the line is wound on the reel, until the plummet or float nearly touches the top of the rod; the finger is kept on the edge of the reel, and a good swing given, almost as if throwing a spinning bait; the finger is removed from the edge of the reel when about half the arc described by the rod has been passed over, and replaced just at the moment the ledger lead, or spinning bait touches the water; great nicety being required to hit the exact time. When using a light quill float, the method of procedure is very different; there would not be weight enough to run the line off the reel, so it is taken between the finger and thumb of the left hand, as far up the rod as can be comfortably reached, and then drawn down in a loop five or six feet in length. The length of line hanging from the top is about equal to the length of the rod, and when a swing is given, as before described, at the right moment the loop is loosed from the left hand, and the float, however light, has quite impetus enough to draw the line out to its full extent.

One thing must be particularly noted, which is, that it is useless to attempt this style of fishing if the wind blow down stream. A place must be chosen where the wind is up stream, and if slightly off shore so much the better.

Many discussions have arisen on this point, and clever anglers have taken great pains to prove that the hook always drags behind the float; but the Nottingham men will not believe this, and *never* fish with the wind down stream.

We have elsewhere remarked upon the great diversity of opinion which exists in different localities as to the methods to be adopted by anglers when pursuing their favourite sport. This is especially the case in reference to ground bait, the most opposite notions as to its composition and use prevailing around the metropolis, and in distant counties. The London angler, for instance, would as soon think of setting forth unprovided with ground bait, or the assurance of finding it ready for him, as he would of leaving home without his tackle and gentle-box. Nor when he had arrived at his swim, would he for one moment dream of wetting his line, unless to plumb the depth, before he had cast in sufficient of this ground bait to draw the fish together. And this practice is absolutely necessary in those waters—notably the Thames and Lea—in which the custom has obtained for years past, and thereby certain places in which the fish have been regularly fed are as regularly frequented by the angler. In fact it would be almost useless to fish at any other spot, unless it were ground baited some time previously. Mr. Salter (who was an excellent bottom fisher) very justly observes that “if, however, ground bait is neglected by the inexperienced, or avoided by the idle fisher, little success will attend his efforts in bottom or float fishing.” Of course he means in those waters in which the fish are few in number, or have been long accustomed to be thus fed. And it may be further observed, that it is chiefly by the judicious use of ground baits, and by fishing at a proper depth, that one angler is more successful than another, although fishing with the same baits and within a few yards of each other.

“Nor is this surprising,” remarks Blaine, “when the rationale of the action of ground bait is considered. Fishes naturally congregate where they have been led by any singularity of appearance in the waters they inhabit; thus they are on the alert, and take every kind of bait eagerly, when a flood is coming down; conscious that food of different kinds is forced along by the sweeping current, they are on the look-out to receive

it; and thus, also when ground bait is thrown down it attracts the attention of the fish, and draws them together, and although their naturally roving disposition may carry them away again, fresh appetite render their absence short, and they instinctively return to the scene of former plenty." But it must be remembered that the principle of ground baiting may be abused, and judgment ought to be exercised to determine when and how large a supply is required, so as to attract the fish without glutting them; for the same reason the ground bait ought always to be of a less tempting description than that used upon the hook. If fish are biting pretty well, be satisfied to leave things alone; if but slowly, and other causes are obviously at work to prevent their feeding, it is folly to throw in any more ground bait, as it would only accumulate, and enable the fish to glut themselves as soon as they became disposed to feed.

A prevailing opinion exists that the Thames puntsmen over ground bait, and they certainly do so to a very great extent, if quantity be considered; but when the composition of the "dumps" furnished by most of these men is taken into account—that is, in comparison with the ground bait you would make yourself—the one three-parts clay, seasoned with a little bran, a few pigs' potatoes, and sometimes a little sour bread; your own, a quartern loaf, pollard, bran, and a small piece of clay, or a stone, to sink a ball of it, the fish may need greater bulk in the former case to attract them at all.

On the principle that from memory fish will repair to spots where they have before found food in considerable quantities, it is the practice of all experienced anglers not only to ground bait during the time they fish, but also the evening before, if possible, which is sure to detain the fish, or bring them again in the morning to revisit the place; and it collects into one focus those fish which otherwise would radiate everywhere around. So convinced are anglers of the advantage of a previous evening's ground baiting that many who cannot be present themselves, send or give directions to have it done for them. When fish are very scarce it is politic to ground bait a place for several successive days previously to angling, to give the distant fish a habit of coming to the spot daily.

In the use of ground baits, the nature of the water and

the kind of fish should be considered. It is essential that the ground and hook baits be of the same character, but not necessary that their qualities be the same; the latter should, on the contrary, be more attractive, or, as we might say, *piquant*. A quick rapid stream must have massive ground bait, that will resist the current; in still waters that which is more easily diffused is to be preferred, there being no current to carry it away.

Roach and dace, chub and bream, frequent spots where malt and malt-house sweepings, chaff, bran, &c., have been previously scattered, and particularly where grains, wash, or like refuse find their way into the river from brewhouse or distillery.

Carrion unscoured gentles are largely used for ground bait for roach and barbel, those clean and tough from being cleaned in sand or bran, being generally supposed to be preferred by the fish, but this preference we believe to be entirely confined to the angler. Scoured gentles are cleaner and tougher, but, as we have stated elsewhere, we consider that a large black and white gentle fresh from fish or carrion, is far more tempting even to the most fastidious fish.

Bran and clay ground bait is the one most commonly used amongst fishermen and anglers for roach, dace, and bleak. Take some adhesive clay, and mix with it a quantity of bran or coarse pollard. Of this mixture drop in here and there around you masses of the size of a small hen's egg. If the current be strong put a stone within each ball sufficient to sink it, and cast it in rather above the part of the water you wish it to rest in. "This ground bait," says Blaine, "we recommend as the most proper for swift streams and currents of large rivers as the Thames, &c. In such waters a large supply is necessary to meet the driftings and solvent powers of the rapid flow; and this not being costly, can be thrown down in liberal quantities, on which success so much depends, and there existing nothing to glut the fish there is no fear of satiety."

A meal ground bait is one which is particularly calculated for the deep pools of rivers and gentle eddies, which form the strongholds of roach, dace, chub, and carp. Among the London anglers we think it is in more common use in the Lea than in the Thames, which perhaps is owing less to its extreme lightness of texture than to

the cupidity of the puntsmen who usually accompany the angler, and are very frequently allowed to find ground bait for him, for which they make a charge; and as a shilling or eighteenpence, for bran and clay, will pay better than two shillings or half-a-crown for bread and pollard in sufficient quantities, so bran and clay are usually recommended; and, for reasons before stated, are perhaps sufficient for all ordinary fishings; but a meal ground bait is certainly more attractive, and where much is expected much must be done to deserve it.

Mr. Salter's method of making this ground bait is one of the best, and agrees with our own in essentials. He says, "For a day's angling a quartern loaf is necessary, the crust of which will cut off, the crumb to be cut in slices about two inches thick, and put into a pan, or some deep vessel, and covered with water; when the bread is quite soaked squeeze it nearly dry, then add the bran and pollard by handfuls, equal quantities of each, and knead them together similar to making bread, until the whole is nearly as stiff as clay. In making this ground bait it requires some labour and time. The qualities of this ground bait for cleanliness, and its tendency to attract fish will, however, amply repay any trouble in the making of it. It is to be observed of it, that it is more calculated for ground baiting still deeps or very mild currents, it being neither heavy enough to withstand rapids, nor will it, from its very solvent properties, bear a stone well within its masses. The best ground bait is that, in every situation, which remains stationary and dissolves slowly."

Take barley meal one part, mashed potatoes three parts, and stiff, clean, adhesive clay or marl two parts; work these well together and they will form a cheap and excellent ground bait for almost any waters, and for all the usual fish for which ground bait is used.

A very useful ground bait for rivers with still deeps, where fish of almost every variety abound, as in some parts of the Trent, the Severn, and the Wye, may be made as follows:—Mix with some stiff clay as much coarse pollard as it will bear without destroying its adhesiveness. If well worked it will retain its tenacity with an equal weight of meal nearly. At the water side, separate pieces about the size of a goose's egg, into which stick a few worms and a few gentles. As these escape from the dissolving clay

they are seized on by the fish, who continue to wait in the expectation of more, and are thus ready to take the angler's bait also if it show a more tempting appearance than the other. It will add to its good qualities if some well soaked greaves be mixed with it. From long experience we can recommend this ground bait strongly, as a most excellent one for the still deeps of very large rivers.

Fresh brewer's grains are often used on the Trent, and form a good ground bait, particularly when they come from a private family, as these have more substance than those from a brewery. Sand may be mixed with them, but they are only fit for still water or very gentle currents.

Many anglers have a strong and, we cannot help feeling, well-founded aversion, to the use of any ground baits for roach which contain clay, mud, or even sand, although they do not consider the last very objectionable. A favourite ground bait with them is composed of barley meal two quarts, toppings or pollard two quarts, and bran one quart; it should be mixed with hot water, and thoroughly kneaded until quite tough. A few boiled potatoes are supposed by many to improve it; this bait should be made up into small balls, with a little clean gravel or a small stone in each. If well made it is so tough that it will stand well in the strongest stream.

For ponds a little chewed bread may be used from time to time, or some stale crumb of bread well kneaded up with a little cold water until it will sink when thrown in. These last disperse directly they reach the water, and are very effective.

**Carrion Gentles.**—We must not omit this favourite bait, but we think it ought not to be used on the same day the place is to be fished. They should be thrown in the day before; this may be managed either by enclosing them in clay balls, or, what perhaps is better, by tying them up with a quantity of sand in a piece of coarse open canvas, and throwing the "pudding" into the place intended to be baited; of course taking the precaution of attaching a string to the canvas, to draw it out when done with. The gentles will work through the cloth and soon reach their destination.

When fishing the next day, two or three gentles may be added to each small ball of ground bait, but if many be



used the fish will gorge themselves and neglect the hook.

**Ground baiting on the Trent.**—On this river, which we consider as typical, or representative, as the Thames or Lea, there is a great aversion to use any clay or mud to sink the ground bait. If wheat and malt are used for bait, the ground bait is usually brewer's grains, or sometimes only a few pellets of the hook bait thrown in; if gentles are used a few are thrown in some yards above, so as to settle about the place the float travels over, and if lobworms are employed a few are chopped up into very small pieces and thrown in as above; red worms are used in the same manner, but it must be remembered that the Nottingham roach fisher allows his gossamer line and light float to travel in the clear water ten or fifteen yards below the spot he stood upon, and will then hit the majority of bites with ease and certainty.

**Boiled Rice** is often extremely useful, as it swells enormously, and is very adhesive when used with bran and pollard. It may be added with advantage to any ground bait.

Mr. Joseph Briggs, in the *Field* of Aug. 7, 1869, speaking of a great day among the roach in the Trent, says, "I never bait a hole, as I consider it somewhat unsportsmanlike, by enabling the fisherman to take too many fish at one time." The take on this occasion was 100 roach, some weighing one pound each. This axiom is very well for the Trent, where the fish are far more numerous in proportion to the area of water, than they are in the Thames, Lea, or any metropolitan water, and we certainly consider that there is no great magnanimity in abstaining from ground bait when it is proved to be unnecessary; we may say, however, that we are not acquainted with any place on the Thames or Lea where a tenth of the above number of fine roach could be captured without it.

**Colonel Williamson's Ground Bait.**—This consisted of oatmeal browned over the fire, and afterwards worked up to a stiff paste with treacle. Pieces the size of a small marble are thrown in near the hook, and in some waters it is remarkably effective.

Overdosing the fish with ground bait is a farce, opposed both in theory and practice to every notion of common sense. Men do not surfeit themselves before they sit down

to dinner, and to give fish as much as they can eat of greaves, worms, gentles, and bread, before you invite them to partake of a worm suspiciously suspended on a hook attached to a line, is equally absurd. How such a system could have lasted so long amongst a class of men who really do occasionally think for themselves; are fond of arguing with each other; and who endeavour to come to a just conclusion; is one of the contradictions which prove how fallible is poor human nature.

Upon one occasion a gentleman and his fisherman were angling from his punt at Marlow, and we were fishing from the bank. He had a great tub of ground bait, of which he most liberally cast in large balls to propitiate the roach, dace, and chub. Yet they would not come to hook. During this time we could hear all the angler uttered, and the words were something to this effect:—"Give them another lump of ground bait, Bob. They don't come about us, do you think you have put enough worms in it? Perhaps the bran is sour, Bob; or maybe, Bob, the bread is musty. I don't fancy the greaves, Bob, are as good as they used to be; this new-fangled hydraulic pressure work I am told the tallow-chandlers use extracts every bit of fat, and leaves but skin and rubbish. Give them another lump, Bob: that gentleman is taking some good roach and chub from the bank."

And so we were, for although they had one of the best swims at Marlow, we thoroughly beat them by the most simple of plans, and for the most natural of reasons. We were sitting out of sight of the fish as a matter of course, at the head of a very quiet, steady stream, about four feet deep, using a light Nottingham line, a small float, and baiting with paste made with wheaten flour and a little honey. Every now and then we chewed a little bread, and blew it from our mouth into the water. This was quite sufficient to attract the notice of our fish, without pampering them, and when the bait floated down they were on the *qui vive*, and quite ready for it; and thus nearly every swim we got a bite, and about every three swims took a fish of some sort, big or little. We met this gentleman at the "Complete Angler" at dinner, the same night, and he, on recognising us, inquired what we had baited with. We told him truly what we had thrown in, and what we covered our hook with. He rang the bell,

sent for his fisherman, and told him what we had just communicated. Bob scratched his head, desired to see our fish, which were fetched in. After turning over several roach of more than a pound each, and dace galore, he exclaimed, "If my father was to rise from his grave, and tell me them fish were taken as that ere gent says, I'd tell him he was a ——" "There, that will do!" cried the angler. "Bob, leave the room." Bob did leave the room, but only to tell the fishermen in the kitchen what he had heard in the parlour, and there was but one opinion amongst these sapient and long experienced men,—that we had walked away from the truth. But if not taken in this way, how were they taken? We were in sight of more than one punt the whole of the time, and not a boat came in on that day with more than a few small fish.

The fact is, it is to the interest of the puntsman to make angling as cumbersome as possible. Lighten it of its half hundredweight of clay, quarterns of bread, pecks of gentles, and hundreds of worms, and a punt is scarcely necessary. How is it on almost every other river in England but the Thames? On the Trent a punt with an angler therein is scarcely to be seen between Biddulph and Gainsboro, and it will hardly be said that those who wield the rod over silvery Trent have not well earned the right to be heard upon such a subject.

"When fishing with boiled wheat, &c., a similar practice may be adopted to that spoken of in paste or gentle fishing. Grains may, however, be thrown in instead of wheat or barley, as the former separate better in the water, and do not clog in lumps. Angling with worms in the same way, the worms for ground bait should be almost minced."—*Bailey*.

On Sept. 21, 1868, we were witness to one of the greatest takes of roach we have ever seen on the Thames. The fish were taken from a punt by two rodsters, the sport being close under the high bank on the Berkshire side, not far from the entrance to the Thame. It is the same spot mentioned by us, in No. 2 of "The Rail and the Rod," as the one from which Tom Wells, of Brightwell, and his boy, took so many perch. It is perhaps better indicated as being in an exact line with the first gate on the tow-path which skirts Hog Common. Here Mr. Mark Raphael and Mr. Hart commenced angling with gut lines and run-

ning Nottingham tackle as soon as it was light, and left off at eleven o'clock A.M., with 87lb. of roach, quitting the swim fairly satisfied, while the fish were still well on the feed. There was not a roach under a quarter of a pound amongst the take, and none more than one pound two ounces; but considering that it was a dead easterly wind, and they fished not more than six hours in all, the quantity is most remarkable. It is true this hole is a good deal ground baited, and but little fished, the vegetable offal of a slaughtered bullock being occasionally thrown in by an old angler in the neighbourhood: but upon this occasion, it would seem; there was a meal provided for the roach far more attractive than even this savoury bovine salad. I was certainly not prepared for the foresight evidenced by these gentlemen, and in the cause of my brother anglers they must excuse my making it known—an apology being less necessary, as I find the plan has been resorted to by others with marked success. Any one who has seen the Thames tidal way at low water must have observed the red mud which lines its banks, the colour arising from innumerable small worms. Here then is the secret. A keg, or nine-gallon cask, is filled with this mud, and it is conveyed to the appointed angling *rendezvous* and placed on the lid of the punt-well. A piece of gutta-percha tubing is fitted to a tap attached to the bottom of the keg, the other end being carried down and made fast to the bottom of the river with a punt pole, and then the tap is turned slightly on, being checked from time to time as the fish come or go off the feed; thus the mud and animalculæ are carried down the stream, attracting every fish for some distance below to within reach of the angler's bait. The lure used for the first hour was the blood-gnat worm, found at the extreme inland portions of these deposits, up the ditches, creeks, and in any mud left stagnant for a time. The common practice is to wash them out of their soft homes by laving water over them; and if left, they become gnats; but finding they were pestered with small chub, gudgeon, and dace, they tried gentles with more success, and ultimately a paste of flour mixed with sheep's blood. It is difficult to guess how far this method of ground baiting, if made general, would agree with the notions of the conservators of the Thames, who might well be surprised at the removal of the disgraceful

mud banks of Kew and Hammersmith into the more rural districts; but, after all, it would be but a description of retributive justice to take the filth to the places from whence it came. Kingston and Windsor at least would not be able conscientiously to repudiate their offspring. I am fully convinced, crowded as the greater portion of the Thames is with roach, that there are comparatively few of half a pound in weight, and that those of a pound or more are very few and far between. In this respect the Thames will not bear comparison with many of our other English rivers, more particularly the Dorset Avon, the lower Exe, the Darent, &c.

We may be pardoned for quoting a high authority upon this subject of our art, to which our attention has been called. At pp. 22 and 23 of "A Book on Angling," by Francis Francis, is: "The following plan is an ingenious one; it was communicated to me by an old roach fisher, who declared it to be a great patent. I have never tried it myself, but the angler can do so if he chooses. It often happens that when the water is clear and low the fish are difficult to attract, whereas if you could discolour the water a little you would not only coax the fish to come to your swim, but you would induce them to take well. . . . Get a tube shaped like a trumpet or a post-horn, or get a common funnel with a large tube, then get three or four lengths of zinc or tin pipe, which will fit into each other in joints like ferrules, of a foot or eighteen inches each in length, screw on a sufficient number of these to reach the bottom of the water. Tie a stone or weight on to the same end sufficient to sink to the bottom and keep it steady. Then thrust it overboard to the bottom of the water, the funnel remaining above the water and handy to you. Have a tub near, in which mix up some clay or mould with plenty of water. Stir it up until it becomes thick slush, then take a half-pint mug full of this liquid and pour it into the funnel. This runs slowly out of the lower end of the tube at the bottom of the water, and thickens it for two or three minutes, quite sufficient to attract the fish and set them biting, while it does not fill their bellies like ground bait. Dropping your hook-bait into the muddy stream, let it follow it down, and you will be likely to get a bite or two. You can renew the colouring matter about every quarter of an hour, and, said my

informant, 'no matter how low or bright the water, you will get sport when none of the boats or fishermen near you will perhaps be able to get any.' " There is nothing new under the sun, whatever may be novel above it! The *modus operandi* of the anglers alluded to by me, as fishing thus opposite the Thame entrance, was much more simple than this, as the bare turning of the tap at your elbow is sufficient to regulate the flow. Of course any mud from a neighbouring ditch or pond will do to a certain extent; but in the instance of which I have made mention the filth was taken from the banks of the Thames at Hammersmith, and, for obvious reasons, kept hermetically secured in the tub, so that no objectionable effluvia could escape.

## CHAPTER VIII.

ROACH AS AN ARTICLE OF FOOD — HOW TO COOK — AMERICAN  
METHOD OF COOKING—CRIMSON ROACH.

**As Food.**—"He is a fish of no great reputation, and his spawn is accounted much better than any other part of him."—*Walton*.

"The roe, which is green and boils red, is remarkably good. They differ greatly in goodness, according to the rivers in which they are caught. None are good that are kept in ponds."—*Naturalist's Cabinet*, vol. v.

"It is in little estimation generally for table, but it is best as food, as well as finest in colour, in October,—a state produced probably by the variety as well as quantity of nutriment obtained during a long summer: it is in this month that it is most sought after by the Thames anglers."—*Yarrell*.

The roach, which is now in no estimation, and thought useful only as food for better fish, was probably more valued formerly. According to Blomfield, in 1413, Clement Paston, Esq., and others, trespassed on the ponds belonging to the Abbot of St. Bennets, and took 200 roaches, 200 perch, and 300 eels, which were together valued at 100 shillings, a high price then. Yet in L'Estrange's "Household Book," which refers to the next century, few notices of fresh-water fish are to be found. A barrister friend informs us that this value was only nominal, as were the numbers also, but lawyers assume a great deal.

When large roach are scored across the sides, and broiled with the scales on, they are considered by many a well-flavoured fish, especially in the autumn and winter seasons.

**Cooking Roach, &c.**—I feel assured that no one thing is more neglected in this country than the cooking of fish. How is it that at tables east of London, barbel, roach, dace, and even the white bream are brought to table and eaten by the most fastidious with relish and thankfulness? With one style of cooking the roe of the barbel is a violent poison; by another treatment it becomes palatable and wholesome. The mere fact of washing and boiling it either in vinegar or vinegar and water, making the difference. Roach from one kitchen shall appear a sappy, soddened, sickly pulp, only held together by a framework of loose bones. From another, with firm and flaky flesh, a single one affording, with a well-boiled potato, a relishing meal. And who that has partaken of dace, hot and hissing from the brazier of the dark-eyed Rebecca, will gainsay that this much-despised fish is delicious when cooked as she can cook them? The truth is, we are all behindhand in our knowledge of cookery, and blame our fresh-water fish when we ought to take the shame to ourselves.

“Take a roach—the sooner after he is caught the better—of about half a pound or upwards, and having wiped the scales off him—which may be done with a coarse cloth without injuring the flesh, as with a knife—dredge it with flour, and having your fat or oil ready boiling in the pan, lay him gently therein; do not crack or break the skin; keep it as much as possible from touching the pan, by causing it to float in the grease, and turn with a flat dumpling-strainer, or other similar instrument, and it will brown by the mere contact with its seething bath. A squeeze of lemon, or drop or two of vinegar, when on the plate, will add a zest. Now I have not said anything about gutting the fish. Indeed I strictly enjoin you not to do so. When the fish comes to table, all you have to do is to divide the flesh down the back with your knife—the fins and their bones being avoided—strip one side and then the other of the fish, which you will find you can do in perfect and unbroken flakes, and place the anatomical structure on a separate plate for removal. Or if you are in immediate proximity to the kitchen—or what is still better, if you have the stove at your elbow—remove the flesh before it is placed upon the table.”—*Rev. J. Martin.*

**Cooking Fish.**—Many have been the good dinners we have made beside the stream—being our own cook—upon



some of the roach caught to earn the meal ; and as there is no appetite like one obtained by labour, and no flavour like that the open air imparts, the relish has been beyond description. The angler should be provident at starting, taking with him a loaf—in a hole in which some butter has been hidden—salt, pepper, and lucifers, not forgetting something in a flask wherewith to adulterate the pure element, and his cuisine is thus far complete. A handful of dry sticks, some leaves, turf, or any dry rubbish, will afford fuel, and a flat stone cleansed in the river and placed to warm by the fire, will afford a good substitute for a plate.

The fish should be washed clean, particularly the throats, cut open and gutted, but no water should touch the inside, as the natural juices should be retained as far as possible. Take off the heads, score the sides slightly, and pepper and salt them well, inside and out. Cut some twigs of blackthorn, or any hard wood, peel and trim the ends, and run the pointed end of one along the backbone of each roach, sticking the thick ends into the ground, so that the fish may lean over the fire.

The appearance of the inside of the fish will tell you when they are done. Take them off the twigs, one by one, with a twist to disengage the stick from the flesh ; lay them on your hot stoue plate, and butter them while warm.

In cooking perch after this fashion, it is much better to leave the scales on ; they protect the juices of the fish, and peel off all in one flake.

We are told by an American friend and angler, of the following recipe for baking or steaming fresh-water fish : “ Let the fire be a good one, to produce the requisite amount of live embers. When it is burned down it is ready both for potatoes and fish. Do not cut off the heads of the fish, but season them, and then take a piece of strong thin paper, and smearing it thinly with butter, roll a fish in it. After saturating each fish so encased in the stream, lay them side by side in the bed of hot ashes, cover them up, and give a minute to an inch ; that is, if a fish is ten inches long, give it ten minutes, and so on. When you uncover them they can be removed from the ashes by inserting the forked end of a long stick beneath, and drawing them out. When you take them out of the

paper, unroll them carefully on a flat stone, open and butter them to your liking, and, above all, regard the head as a precious morsel; it contains much, when done in this fashion, that is glutinous and fatty. In the language of Father 'Izaak,' 'they are too good for any but honest anglers.' Old anglers have confessed, after a roast or bake (in the former plan doing the fish on flat stones previously heated in the fire), that they had missed much by not adopting this simple way of providing a sumptuous dinner, and that all household methods, with their epicurean appliances, were not to be compared with roasting or baking under the ashes. The latter is the surest method of retaining the natural flavour of the fish."

We have heard of large chub and roach being cooked in the artful gipsy fashion of surrounding the fish, entrails, scales and all in a dumpling of clay, and submitting this to a hole previously dug, in which a wood fire had left but its embers, and then closing the top with a turf. But commend us to the toasting and baking processes.

Roach in different waters vary much in condition and general appearance, and sometimes assume colours approaching those of the carp. The roach in the Yeading brook which passes through Isleworth, near the Royal Oak, are particularly noted for their rich, handsome appearance; but the most curious instance of abnormal colouring which has come to our knowledge is that related below.

**Crimson Roach.**—"A roach weighing one pound two ounces, its extreme length  $13\frac{1}{2}$  inches, and greatest depth  $3\frac{1}{2}$ , colour of body of a delicate pale crimson tint, which seen through the silvery scales was excessively beautiful, was taken by Mr. John Benjamin, in October, 1868, from Mr. Benningfield's water, at Broxbourne. The gill covers were of a beautiful golden tint, and the whole of the fins of a vivid crimson, surpassing in brilliancy and depth of colour those of the perch."—*Field*, 3rd October, 1868.

We will conclude with a few hints, the results of long experience, which escaped notice in their proper places.

All tackle should be as good and carefully made as the means at the angler's command will admit: it should be kept in good condition, and packed away so as to be available at a moment's notice. The young angler especially should learn to whip a hook on to hair or gut, to put on a

ring, or splice a broken rod; but we have not thought it advisable to go into the detail of tackle making, which has been well and often treated of by other writers.

When punt fishing, the attendant should never be allowed to bait the hook, or take the fish off; the latter is a fruitful source of damage, the gut or hair being, by clumsy handling, crippled where it is tied to the hook. To avoid this we constantly use a disgorging, which prevents this mischief, and causes the hooks to last much longer. It is curious to notice the difference in durability between gut and hair; the former, if drawn fine, sometimes frets, and loses its strength in a day's fishing; the latter, with care, will last for years, and does not deteriorate by the action of the water. All rods, lines, floats, &c., should be carefully overhauled from time to time, the requisite repairs made, and the rods varnished when necessary.

When proper time can be given for the varnish to dry well, coachmaker's copal is the best that can be used, but as this takes a long time in drying, shellac dissolved in wood naphtha makes an excellent tough varnish, which dries in a few minutes. Spirits of wine is often recommended as a solvent for this gum, but varnish made with it is more liable to chill, and it will not dissolve so much shellac; whereas good wood naphtha will unite with the gum in any proportions. There are several sorts of wood naphtha, some of which will not dissolve shellac, but the best is sold especially for the use of hat makers, and can be obtained at Cooper's, 20, Moor-street, Soho. There are two methods of making up tackle, one with dry silk, the other with silk waxed. If the former be preferred, it may be varnished with the shellac varnish just mentioned, but if shoemaker's wax has been employed, a varnish must be used that will combine with it, such as the dammar varnish mentioned p. 37.

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